TheVillage

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Issue #241 February 2024

NEWS & FEATURES from Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Blackwell, Burcot Beoley, Cofton Hackett, Finstall, Hopwood, Bordesley, Rowney Green, Lickey, Lickey End, Marlbrook, The Oakalls & everywhere in between!

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TheVillage Issue 241 February 2024

inside

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Front cover: A frosty view above Hopwood, by Dennis Brown, of Alvechurch.

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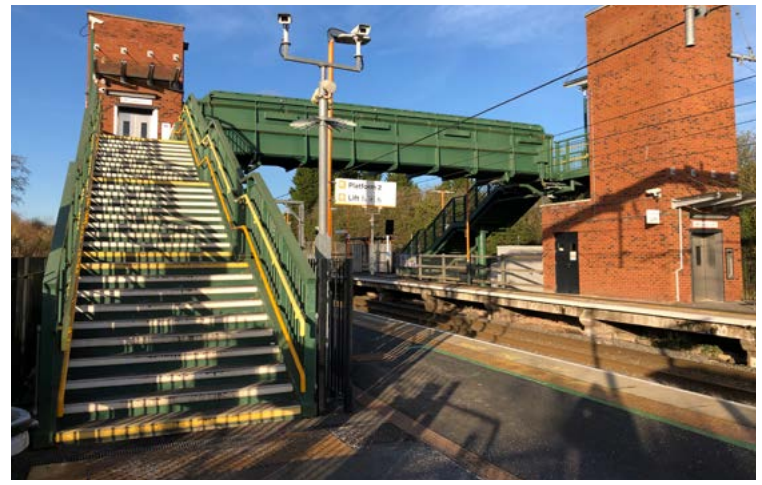
A saga of lift failures



Daunting: The steep climb facing disabled passengers at Alvechurch.

VILLAGE RAIL passengers, particularly those who are disabled or have difficulty climbing stairs, are still struggling to board trains as the Network Rail lifts saga sees the company compared to the Post Office.

Barnt Green passengers have waited for more than eight years for the lifts that should have been included when a new footbridge was installed.

And now disabled passengers at Alvechurch have suffered a long wait for a lift to be repaired at their station after vermin caused a short circuit in the equipment.

The lift has been out of action for a couple of months already and it could be March, or later, before a new control panel can be delivered and fitted. At Barnt Green, the long-promised lifts, which have seen start dates come and go, are back in the design stage after new surveys of the site were carried out before Christmas to meet updated fire regulations.

There is still hope that work may start this year. Barnt Green Parish Council chairman Robert Cholmondeley said: "It is quite disappointing, but things are slowly grinding forward.

"Unfortunately, Network Rail appears to be above the law, a bit like the Post Office."

'DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD'

VILLAGERS have been warned that the promise of extended and upgraded station parking comes with the possibility of increased traffic – and could even make a large "strategic" development such as Barntchurch more likely.

Alvechurch county councillor Aled Luckman told parish councillors that after secret negotiations the county had bought the field next to the often-flooded station car park in the village and was ready to start on plans for an extension.

"The funding for it is already in the budget. We can now get plans in place. When those will be brought forward, I don't know, but the funding is there," he added.

The news was welcomed by parish chairman Marc Worrall, but he warned: "It is a double-edged sword. Why? Because in providing bigger and better parking, inevitably it will attract more people.

Regular sight: The flooded car park.

"And from a strategic planning argument, it ticks a lot of boxes. It creates a sustainability argument for more houses in our area."

The rail corridors south of Barnt Green and the potential for station extensions was one of the arguments put forward for a 15,000-home "garden village" in the area, dubbed Barntchurch.

In the short term, Coun Worrall said: "It's great to have a car park, but the fact is that will attract people from outside the area.

"There were complaints from the local residents in Station Road and Latimer Road, pre-covid, about overspill parking, which was causing a big nuisance. You have to pay for parking at Redditch, so for anyone north of Redditch, it becomes much more attractive to come to Alvechurch where parking is free.

"There will also be the extra traffic into the village and up Bear Hill. It is going to affect our infrastructure and I would be expecting the county council to have done the highway studies."

Coun Luckman said: "At the moment, Alvechurch is one of the few station car parks that doesn't charge for parking. Of course, any improved parking will naturally become a charging car park, so you may have fewer people coming for that reason."

District councillor Alan Bailes said: "The planning application will come to us at Bromsgrove. We will hear all the problems from local people, so to go through we will have to work as one."

A stronger Green Belt

NATIONAL PLANNING policy has taken another turn, with house-building targets relaxed and the Green Belt strengthened.

The National Planning Policy Framework, announced just before Christmas, should relieve the pressure on village green fields by allowing a local housing needs assessment to determine targets.

Alvechurch South district councillor Alan Bailes, who is on Bromsgrove's planning committee, told *The Village*: "This gives local councils far more freedom to set lower housing targets if informed and evidenced by local housing needs assessments to establish housing requirements for neighbourhoods.

"The guidance also allows authorities to allocate less land to future development if local officials can argue that more development would damage the character of an area or require building on Green Belt land."

He added: "The framework will also ensure that relevant planning conditions are in place which refer to clear and accurate plans with drawings that provide visual clarity about the design of the development, and are clear about the approved use of materials where appropriate.

"This will provide greater certainty for planning authorities implementing planning permissions on how to comply with the permission and a clearer basis to identify breaches of planning control."

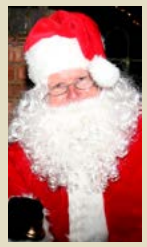
Barely a ripple

THE "TSUNAMI of shoplifting" in Barnt Green has subsided, parish councillors heard. PCSO Julie Garvey told them: "It seems to have settled down. There was a spike where they were coming in from the station, shoplifting and then going back to the station, but we have not had reports of incidents recently."

A STARLING murmuration (above) has been gathering over Redditch during January. Birders are hoping it grows as large as the mesmerising displays seen from the top of Car Park 2 of the Kingfisher Centre in late February 2018.

Santa 'debacle'

BARNT GREEN Parish Councillors are already searching for a Santa after failing to find one to help switch on the lights last December.



"We have got to avoid the debacle of Father Christmas this year and get one signed up very early," chairman Robert Cholmondeley said. "Charlie [Coun Hotham, pictured] stepped in and did a fantastic job, but it is not what we should have to do."

On the plus side, the parish council does now own a Santa suit.

BARNT GREEN Parish Council chairman Robert Cholmondeley (above, left) presents the Best Christmas Window Award to Phil Slater, of Barnt Green Antiques.

Best Christmas decoration awards in Alvechurch went to: Alvechurch Dental Practice (commercial); 130 Redditch Road (front door or window); 15/17 Crown Meadow (external and/or garden)

Parish to build firm Foundation

BARNT GREEN Parish Council is to apply for Foundation status in the Local Council Award Scheme.

The award will demonstrate that the council is operating to national professional standards.

There are three stages, Foundation, Quality and Quality Gold and the council agreed with Coun Charlie Hotham, who said: "We should start at Foundation and work up from there."

Alvechurch Parish Council has Quality Gold status and Lickey & Blackwell Parish Council has Foundation status.

Village shed?

VILLAGE MEN could soon get their own "shed" similar to the Men in Sheds initiative in Bromsgrove.

Two representatives attended Alvechurch Parish Council's January meeting to explain the benefits to the participants and community.

The Bromsgrove shed is run by Age UK, although anyone could set up a group. Parish councillor Keith Wiseman said: "The Lounge is very keen to move forward with this and we have spoken to other groups who could get involved, such as the footpath group and the friends of Alvechurch station.

"We are now planning a public consultation to see how it could be moved forwards."

Parish councillors gave the initiative their backing and said they would like to hear more detail.

Access still denied

THE NEW access gate leading to public open space on the CALA Homes housing estate in Barnt Green remains locked. District councillor Charlie Hotham told the parish council that Bromsgrove's planning officers were "working on it".

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Speed crackdown

Speeding traffic is coming under the spotlight across the area in the lead-up to the election of the next West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner in May.

Current commissioner John Campion has made road safety a "key pillar" of his plans and recently made £250,000 available for local communities, mainly via parish councils, to bid for to pay for road safety projects.

Alvechurch Parish Council agreed at its January meeting to press ahead with bids for a traffic calming scheme at Weatheroak and a speed restriction scheme at Bordesley.

The need for police support for the reduction of the speed limit from 40mph to 30mph through Bordesley has been highlighted by the district councillor for Alvechurch South, Alan Bailes.

He was surprised to hear at the parish council meeting that the police were objecting to the plan, which had already been backed by the county county highways team.

In a subsequent letter to Mr Campion, Coun Bailes said: "Following a request from [local pressure group] Bordesley Matters and an accompanying detailed technical assessment, the county council has seen fit to support and pursue a speed limit reduction from 40mph to 30mph through the village of Bordesley.

"It would appear that the main point of concern raised by the police is enforcement, with the reason being those drivers 'show good compliance with the existing speed limit', but evidence shows the contrary," Coun Bailes added.

"I trust that you will give your urgent consideration to supporting our reduction in the speed of traffic through Bordesley before we have another fatality along the A441."

Mr Campion will be addressing the March meeting of Alvechurch Parish Council when, no doubt, this issue, along with other traffic problems across the area, will come up for discussion.

Meanwhile, two suitable locations in Alvechurch for Community Speedwatch operations – where local volunteers are trained to use speed guns to raise awareness of speeding – have been surveyed and submitted to progress to the next stage.

The sites are on Redditch Road, near the bottom of School Lane, and on Redditch Road on the other side of the village between Hopwood and Roberts Corner.

■ In Barnt Green, the parish council heard from county councillor Adrian Kriss that a Speedwatch scheme could be set up for them if at least six volunteers came forwards to take part in a course.

Anyone interested should email the parish executive officer at: exec@barntgreen.org.uk

MORE THAN 200,000 cars a year are breaking the speed limit as they approach the village schools in Alvechurch.

This shocking statistic was provided by parish councillor Paul Edwards from data recorded by two vehicle-activated signs.

The first (pictured above) is on Birmingham Road, at the junction with Rectory Gardens, and the second on the A441 coming into Bordesley from Redditch.

A year's data from the Alvechurch sign shows 203,734 vehicles (23 per cent) coming into the village each year breaking the limit.

"More than 3,000 are going at 45-65mph - and above . . . and this is approaching the schools," said Coun Edwards.

At Bordesley, where the limit is 40mph, more than 40,000 broke the limit, with 2,783 going faster than 50mph and 76 going faster than if it was a motorway, with speeds of 71-75mph – and above.

Boundary plan puts Barnt Green in Alvechurch

VILLAGERS are being urged to check out proposed changes to the Worcestershire County Council electoral boundaries.

The Boundary Commission carries out a "balancing" of county divisions from time to time to make sure the ratio of councillors to residents in their division is even across the county.

In the current review, Barnt Green would come out of the Beacon division and join an enlarged Alvechurch & Wythall division, which would have two county councillors.

This raises the possibility of there being councillors from different poitical parties representing the same group of villagers.

Beacon county councillor Adrian Kriss told Barnt Green parish councillors that if it happened, he would miss attending their meetings and urged residents to have a look at the changes for themselves.

■ The proposals can be seen at: https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/worcestershire

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VACANCY

An upstairs property (with access via stairs and a stairlift) at **ALVECHURCH ALMSHOUSES** has become vacant and applications are now invited from people over the age of 60 who are in financial/social need. They must be able to live independently and have lived in the parish for over 12 months. The property has a small dedicated garden.

A copy of the application form can be downloaded from our website, www.alvechurchalmshouses.org.uk or alternatively please contact the clerk, Sue Moxon clerk.alvechurchalmshouses@gmail.com 07867387267 or Anne Humphries ahalvechurch@btinternet.com

Closing date for applications: Thursday 29 February 2024

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20 Years Ago

From **The Village** archive

FOR SOME reason lost in the mists of time, we had a joint February/March issue at the beginning of 2004 – so this cover by photographer Jo Cound, of the "dragon tree" in her beloved Lickeys, may well be appearing in this spot next month, too!

IN THE NEWS: Even though work had begun to build the controversial hall known as the Ark at St Laurence Church, Alvechurch, and the roofs were on the new houses in the Black Paddock, sold to pay for the grand project, protesters called a Parish Meeting hoping to secure enough support for a Parish Poll. This would be a referendum of everyone in the parish asking whether they agreed with what the church was doing – and would cost the parish council around £1,000 to administer.

THE WEATHEROAK group meeting of WIs gather round their guest speaker, Tricia Stewart, of Rylestone and District WI in the Yorkshire Dales, who was one of the original *Calendar Girls*, her character being played by Helen Mirren in the hit movie.

BUSINESS NEWS: Mark Sammons (left) opened his chiropractic clinic in Alvechurch, while (above) staff celebrate at George Davis hairdressers after winning the best-dressed Christmas window competition.

10 Years Ago

From **The Village** archive

OUR FEBRUARY 2014 cover featured a great grey shrike after one caused a ripple of excitment through the birding community by taking up residence in Mick's Wood, near Robert's Corner, between Alvechurch and Hopwood. If you think it looks sweet, it is known as the "butcher bird" for the way it impales its prey .

LAND AROUND Alvechurch station was turned into a mudbath as work began on the second line into Redditch, along with another platform and the passenger lifts and bridge between them.

HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE took the opportunity to walk into the deepest narrow lock in the country (left), the Tardebigge top lock (number 58), while it was drained for maintenance work and the fitting of new oak lock gates.

PUPILS celebrate after St Andrew's School, Barnt Green, was declared 'outstanding in all areas' by Ofsted.

ONE FINIAL POINT...

Dear Editor – It is nice to see that the railings have been installed (on Red Lion Street, Alvechurch), albeit some 18 months late and no doubt the parish council will be advising Worcestershire County Council that they do not match the majority of the existing railings as the finials do match the existing ones.

Being in a Conservation Area, I would have thought if compliant on Alvechurch Parish Council to ensure compatibility.

For the record the replacement railings in Swan Street have similar finials that are non-compliant but have been left in-situ, but then again it's only Alvechurch and any old thing will do!

How about the parish council, district council and county council make sure that Alvechurch council tax monies are spent correctly?

M J Betts, Alvechurch

Next Christmas

Dear Editor – It was good to see the community of all ages come out for the Alvechurch Christmas tree light switch on.

However, I was disappointed that if you were near the back of the crowd you couldn't see or hear the singers, which was very disappointing as they had put in a lot of work to put their performances together.

In my opinion, for this year's lights switch-on in 2024, maybe it might be a good idea to have a stage and maybe a PA so everyone who attends, can not only see the event but also hear it.

Also it might be nice to have some more performances throughout the day by local talent, maybe Alvechurch Dramatic Society would like to do something, maybe one of the local dance companies or other local musical artists?

I'm not sure if space would be available but maybe some local vendors there as well, this could be just a few in The Square.

Maybe this is something that Alvechurch Pariah Council might be interested in looking into to make it a nice event to be seen and heard by all.

Paul, Alvechurch

Pretty postbox

Dear Editor – It has been lovely to see the knitted postbox topper on Bear Hill (Alvechurch).

I'd like to say thank you to the group who took the time to make it, I'd like to find out more about it and whether it's been done in aid of anything or just to help our village look prettier.

I took this picture of the one in December but they have since swapped it out for another fantastic knitted topper.

Impressed, Alvechurch

Have your say... about anything!

email: editor@villageonline.co.uk

Please include your name and address – even if you request them to be withheld from publication. We reserve the right to edit submissions for reasons of space or legality.

The deadline for the next issue is February 5th 2024.

WHERE'S VINNY?

THE first winners of 2024, who found Vinny in our December/January hunt the hedgehog competition are Casper and Rufus Willan (aged five and three), from Alvechurch, who proudly show off their own Mini Vinny.

If you want to win one for yourself, you'll need to try to find the little hedgehog hiding somewhere in this magazine (the one shown above is just a guide).

Tell us where he's hiding via email – see details on bottom of the page opposite – and please include your name, address and phone number, and we'll draw a winner at random.

The closing date is midnight on February 5 2023. We'll let you know if you've won and you can collect your Mini Vinny from our office – and pose for a photo with your prize!

TheVillage *View...*

IT has been a while since this green box has featured in *The Village*. Since the new editor took over, in fact. While it might not be back to stay, we wanted to take this opportunity to wish everyone a very happy New Year!

The New Year seemed like it would be a good time to re-introduce ourselves, as we realise there are some misconceptions about the magazine.

***The Village* was set up in October 1998 by local people, and if you received our October issue last year, you might have noticed it was our 25th anniversary – so thank you, again, for more than 25 years of support for our magazine.**

Through the magazine, we deliver news, features and advertising to homes across many of the villages in north-east Worcestershire.

***The Village* is not affiliated with any council or organisation, which allows us to bring you news and information that is completely impartial and independent.**

***The Village* is a free magazine, which means it costs you nothing to receive it, and none of your council tax goes towards the production or distribution of the magazine, as is sometimes assumed.**

All of the revenue generated by the magazine is directly from advertising sales, which means when businesses and organisations choose to advertise with us, they are helping to keep the magazine going.

We'd like to also take this opportunity to thank all our advertisers, old and new, for choosing us and working with us.

The team at *The Village* is smaller than you might expect. Richard is still here (clinging on), but when you get in touch, chances are you'll end up speaking to me, Fran (hello!).

We have some wonderful regular contributors who produce much-loved features each issue and a fantastic team of deliverers who deliver the magazine to you ten times a year.

There are also those who send in stories and images to help us cover as much of village life as possible (such as the Lickey Wassail feature in this issue).

We are sometimes asked why we haven't covered certain events. We rely on information to cover all the things going on in the village area, so please do let us know, or send us pictures, if you have them.

If you have something you'd like to see in *The Village*, please get in touch, send me an email at fran@villageonline.co.uk, or, you can send in photos and a story and we'll always do our best to include it if we can.

Happy New Year

Twice the fun this year

VILLAGERS in Alvechurch braved the chilly weather (or perhaps the cool breeze was soothing for sore heads?), to celebrate the start of 2024 with the traditional Mummers' play and to watch dance performances from local Morris sides.

This year, the dancing and the Mummers' play (put on by the Alvechurch Morris Men) was performed twice, to be enjoyed by double the number of villagers, especially thoughtful for those not up early enough for the first performance at noon.

For the first showing, a large crowd outside The Crown, in Withybed Green to see what this year's players had in store and they were not disappointed. Four Morris sides, including Alvechurch Morris Men, Aelfgythe, Ragged Oak and Black Adder Morris, woke up the crowd with dancing, shouts, bells and cracking of sticks.

The Mummer's play then began in the traditional way, with an introduction from Old Father Time. Along with the well-known characters, who make appearances every year, St George (and the dragon, the Doctor and Little Dick Nip, some recognisable faces from politics and the news made their debut appearances.

"Suella Braverman" garnered the biggest "boo" of the performance, with Rishi Sunak and the water company not far behind (although after generous sprays of water from the water company, the boos died down a bit).

The biggest cheers were reserved for the dragon (and the three children who made up its legs) and Sweet Moll whose chosen young man kissed his muscles in triumph at the end of the play.

After celebrating a job well done with a drink or two, it was time to do it all over again, just up the canal at The Weighbridge.

The Village is looking forward to seeing what this year will bring for the players to perform in 2025!

Clockwise from above: The Mummers players pose outside The Crown. The Alvechurch Morris Men green faces stand out. Aelfgythe's iconic face painted flowers. St George makes a stand. Black Adder dancers and musicians pose together. Aelfythe bash sticks. An Aelfgythe horn is played.

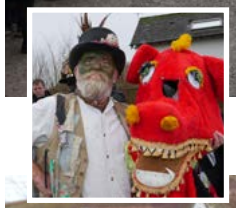
Top left: Two Aelfgythe dancers grin for the camera.
Left: The Alvechurch Morris Men on their instruments
Above: Dancing in Withybed.

Above: Sweet Moll addresses the crowd to cheers of delight.
Above right: St George threatens Just Stop Oil and his orange powder.
Right: The dragon is heroicly taken down.

Aelfgythe's second performance: At The Weighbridge

Watching the play: Plenty of laughs.

Looking triumphant: Morris dancers give a whooping performance.



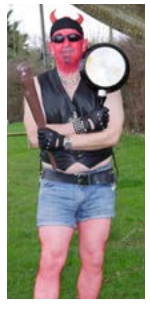
Above: Sweet Moll has an outfit change for her second performance.

Above Left: The familiar red dragon and his handler.
Above: The players make the crowd at The Crown chuckle.

Above: A young villager enjoys the Mummers' play.

Above: The crowd at The Weighbridge are entertained.
Left: A member of Aelfgythe absorbed in playing.

Clockwise from above left: 'Suella Braverman' is booed by the crowd; The dragon and 'Just Stop Oil protestor' enjoy the play from their deathbeds; The play is introduced; Beelzebub, normally seen around the village without the leather and red fishnets; Young 'Rishi Sunak' ruffles feathers; Members of BlackAdder morris group smile for the camera.



Knitting & Giving

KNIT AND NATTER, a village craft group who meet at The Lounge, Alvechurch, celebrated a successful year with their Christmas party (pictured right).

In addition to coming together to celebrate with a buffet, the group took the opportunity to present cheques each for £600 to two worthy causes.

The first cheque, Daphne Cross presented to Sarah James at The Lounge.

The second cheque was presented by Cynthia Lawton to Wayne Church, to go towards Brain Tumour Research. Wayne's son, Finlay, a pupil in Alvechurch, died of a brain tumour in 2015.

The ladies of Knit and Natter raised the funds through table top sales of their fantastic knitted crafts.

They are also the wonderful knitters of *The Village*'s own little hedgehog, Vinny!

Cynthia thanked villagers for their continued support of the group "Thank you all very much it means so much to us".

Above: Cynthia Lawton and Daphne Cross from Knit and Natter present the cheques.

Fundraising families

A village football team, U9SB, known as Alvechurch Lions challenged themselves to raise money for Pathfinder, who provide food and presents to local families at Christmas.

The team completed a charity walk around Arrow Valley Park (three laps of the lake, in fact), in chilly conditions, wearing their football kits and Santa hats, accompaniesd by appropriately dressed "Santa" coaches and "elf" parents.

The team raised over £1,200 from the event, which contributed to Alvechurch FC Community Foundation's larger fundraising target of £5,000. The funds raised by the U9SB team and other fundraising efforts led to this target being smashed.

The U9SP team won Alvechurch FC Community Team of the Year, for their fantastic work, and were presented with £200 to spend on new training equipment.

Above: The team with coaches and parents.
Below: A chilly walk round the lake.

Valentines Larder Lunch

WEDNESDAY 14 FEBRUARY
ALVECHURCH BAPTIST HALL
11AM

The Village Larder team are holding a Valentine's lunch, and you are invited to join them to enjoy food and meet friends, old and new.

Dave Shoesmith, of the larder team said: "We look forward to seeing our regulars and hopefully some new faces to a flower demonstration by Lin Neal followed by lunch.

The morning is open to carers past and present, those who are cared for either by family members or agencies or perhaps if you are just alone."

There is no charge, donations welcome.

If you would like to attend, please ring or message 07866410601 or 0121 447 7369 or e-mail dlshoesmith@yahoo.co.uk to book a place.

Woodland Wassail

MORE than 150 villagers gathered at the Lickey Hills Country Park for their annual Wassail.

Black Adder Morris kicked off the event with music and dancing at the visitor centre.

The Master of Ceremonies (Head Ranger Steve Hinton) then annointed a King Bean and Queen Pea with a new crowning for 2024 which involved a large apple.

The crowd made their way in a procession, led by King Bean and Queen Pea to the Community Orchard where the Master of Ceremonies formally welcomed the crowd to enjoy the festivities.

The group walked around the orchard, making as much noise as possible to ward off evil spirits and bless the forthcoming harvest.

A Mummers' play was performed, the players gave the performance their all, despite limited rehearsal time.

The play, which follows a familiar theme, saw the villains get their comeuppance with the Devil's Huntsman carrying them off on his flaming bull.

As is tradition, the play saw some topical pop-culture characters including an appearance from King Charles III and some naughty politicians.

Villagers enjoyed singing, a Wassail poem by local poet Spoz, and were able to warm themselves on hot apple juice from the campfire.

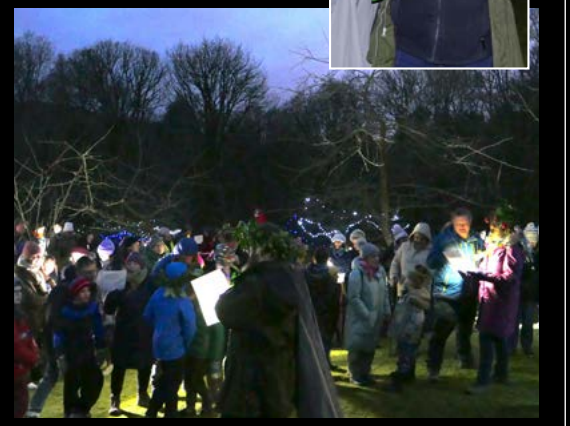
The event was declared a success by revellers and organisers, especially as they braved freezing temperatures and the threat of bad weather to ensure they could join in with the blessing of the new season's bountiful harvest.

Clockwise from above: The crown make their way to the orchard. Young villagers hang toast in the trees. Head Ranger Steve Hinton looks triumphant. Keith Woolford looks suspicious. Queen Pea is crowned.

Left: King Bean and Queen Pea with the Master of Ceremonies and the crowd.
Above: The Mummers' play players pose together.
Below: The crowd enjoy the festivities.

Above: King Bean carries a lantern proudly
.Below: Head Ranger Steve Hinton addresses the Wassail crowd.

Above: Young wassailers bless the harvest with offerings of toast.
Right: The Master of Ceremonies.
Below: The Wassail in full swing.



Village ghost hunters

Francesca Peach meets local research group Midland Paranormal Investigations, who have been investigating unexplained phenomena in the village area for 20 years, to find out more about their experiences with the paranormal and hauntings where we live.

MIDLAND Paranormal Investigations celebrated their 20th anniversary in January. The group meets every two weeks in a pub on the borders of Redditch and Bromsgrove and pride themselves on using a scientific approach to search for answers to unexplained experiences.

The group investigates a broad range of unexpained phenomena, including ghosts, hauntings, survival after death, ESP, psychokinesis and Unexplained Aerial Phenomena (UAPs).

Mark Cave, chairman of the group, said: "We use an objective approach when we do our research and investigations and, on occasion, we have experienced inexplicable events that are way beyond rational explanation."

The group was established in 2004, following a conversation about unexplained phenomena and a shared fascination.

Mark said: "We all wondered why the popular television shows at the time never seemed to find any answers and run away or screamed at the slightest bump or bang instead of trying to find the answer as to what it was they were running away from."

The paranormal investigators are not however, as you might expect, a group of firm believers of ghosts, ghouls or demons.

The team is made up of a healthy mix of sceptics, some non-believers and some who have had their own unexplained experiences but are still undecided.

Meet the investigators: Pete Benton, Mark Cave, Simon Hodge, Kelly Walker, Anita Bryant and Tim Carloss at Bordesley Abbey in 2023.
Image by Matt Felkin.

With a very scientific approach to their investigations, the team use equipment based on measuring the environment.

They use electromagnetic detectors, temperature and humidity detectors, non-contact temperature detectors, vibration sensors and cameras, video cameras and sound recording equipment.

Mark explained: "Some television shows would have you believe some of the equipment they use can detect ghosts, which is scientifically totally unfounded at this moment in time.

"We do not use the popular ghost or spirit boxes used in television shows as these are scanning channels and frequencies that seems to give false positives."

The group meets every two weeks to discuss their next objectives and carry out training to make sure their research and investigation techniques are up to date and at the highest level.

They run training investigations to simulate a real life situation to ensure everyone has chance to use the equipment and understand how it all works.

When speaking with the group, *The Village* was keen to find out more about how they decide where to investigate next.

The decision on where to investigate is usually discussed when they meet, and the group try to find the most credible locations to contact for permission.

The group also said: "We get contacted by members of the general public from time to time, who want us to research and investigate their homes as they had reported experiencing unexplained phenomena occurring and require our services to help them.

"We have also been approached by businesses to investigate their workplaces as staff have reported experiences such as seeing figures and hearing footsteps and voices when no one else has been in that particular location.

"This can be very interesting as one particular building we investigated on behalf of a business was built on the site of several other buildings which included a theatre and also a very large medieval dwelling and stables."

We asked the group to share some of their experiences with the paranormal with us, for our readers.

One member of the team, Kelly Walker, shared her experience during an investigation to Shrewsbury Prison, where she was overcome by the apparent feelings of one (or more) of the prisoners.

She told us: "When we were investigating Shrewsbury Prison, we found ourselves within the 'hanging room'.

"I felt very strongly that I wanted to look out if the windows, kept pacing back and forth and had the feeling that I needed to look out the windows as though it was my last chance."

The next account took place during an investigation the group were conducting for a business.

They were also accompanied by some media students who were filming the investigation which was being led by Mark and Anita Bryant.

Mark recalled: "We were in the cellar section and as I was checking the equipment for any anomalies I heard Anita say: 'I have just seen a shadow pass behind me and go straight through the wall'.

"Anita had just finished and there were no anomalies showing on the equipment, and we could not find anything that would have caused the shadow so we continued filming with the students.

"All of a sudden, a female student who was facing Anita let out the most blood-curdling scream as she saw a shadow of a person come out of the wall and go past her."

Above: A camera is set up to watch for activity.
Right: Examples of some of the equipments used by the team during the investigations.

They spoke about another creepy occurence, which again took place during an investigation of a business:

"We were alone in the building, and in close vicinity where we could all see each other.

"The weather outside was very stormy with high winds and heavy rain.

"It had just gone past midnight and we were all settled into the investigation when Mark decided to try an EVP (Electronic Voice Phenomena) experiment.

"He asked who was reputedly haunting the property and had just mentioned a girl or woman, when immediately afterwards we all heard a woman's shrill scream. The type of scream as if a woman had been surprised.

"We managed to pick up this scream on two audio recorders and two video cameras that were in different locations.

"The person who let us in was upstairs so we thought this may have been his wife or girlfriend letting out the scream if they were playing around.

"When he came to let us out we asked him if his wife or girlfriend was with him and he advised that he was on his own and his wife was at home."

Midland Paranormal Investigations have invited *The Village* to join them on one of their investigations in the village area later in the year. So look out for October's Halloween issue!

If you're interested in finding out more about Midland Paranormal Investigations, you can email info@midlandparanormal.org.uk or text or call 07757 968056.

The group would welcome anyone interested in joining them to attend one of their fortnightly meetings so they can meet the team.

Lickey & Blackwell Parish Council News

Newsletter February 2024

Christmas Events

It has been a busy period for the Parish Council with Christmas events for our residents. We would like to thank everyone who took part and made these occasions so enjoyable. The Parish Council collaborated with Blackwell Community Hall on 8th December 2023 for the first time to organise a community event to celebrate Christmas in Blackwell. Santa arrived at St Catherine's Church and turned on the lights to the delight of the children.

This was followed by mulled wine, mince pies and soft drinks at the Community Hall. It was a great success as nearly 100 residents attended. Prizes were given to all pupils from Blackwell First School who entered the Christmas competition. The winners in Blackwell were Eva Grace-Collins and Evie Blagrove.

Santa lighting the Christmas tree at St Catherine's Church, Blackwell.

The winning Christmas card design, by Emily.

All photographs courtesy of Chairman Cllr Bakul Kumar

The Lickey School choir.

On 10th December 2023, a crowded Trinity Church heard children from Lickey Primary School perform Christmas carols supported by Blackwell Concert Band. Santa arrived and handed prizes to all the children from Lickey who took part in the Christmas competition. The winners were Harper Edge, Sophia Field and Emily. Emily was the overall winner with her drawing used as the Parish Council Christmas card (main picture, above).

Celebrating 100 years

On 13th of December 2023, Mrs Audrey Tomkinson, of Blackwell, celebrated her 100th birthday with a card from King Charles (pictured left). It was fitting that the Parish Council celebrated this occasion with a party for her in the Community Hall which was well attended. Audrey was pleasantly surprised with the arrangements, including a cake made by a fellow Blackwell resident and a video depicting her life as a nurse, shopkeeper and housewife.

Footpaths

We were sad to say goodbye to our footpath warden Allan Postgate after several years of fantastic work around the Parish and we hope a new warden will be starting soon. Allan has worked hard clearing and repairing public footpaths and we encourage residents to report any issues and do what they can to keep them in good order. There have been some problems with tipping of garden waste on to footpaths behind houses in some areas, which is not permitted.

Highways

The Parish Council has been working with Lickey School and the County Council to improve parking issues in Lickey. We hope to see some improvement following measures taken.

Contact Us

Lisa Winterbourn, our Executive Officer, may be contacted on: eo@lickeyandblackwellpc.org or: 07930 837770. For more info visit: www.lickeyandblackwellpc.org or facebook.com/lickeyandblackwellcouncil

Fresh face for the pharmacy

Barnt Green pharmacy's new owners tell *The Village* what you can expect from the store, including increased community engagement and changes to make getting your prescriptions easier and more efficient than ever.

ONLY the most eagle-eyed villagers may have noticed that in January Barnt Green pharmacy changed hands, and is now owned by an independent company – and by a local family!

Deepak Gupta, a Boots-trained pharmacist, worked in large pharmacies before stepping into the shoes of being owner and buying his own pharmacy, and then bought another, before expanding into Barnt Green.

Natasha Ganatra-Gupta is a Lloyds-trained pharmacist who has worked as a manger for a large chain and went on to becoming a prescriber who now works with doctors surgeries and hospitals.

The couple said: "Much of our family are pharmacists and have a combined experience of over 65 years.

"During this time there have been many changes in pharmacy and of course many challenges. It is however how you overcome these challenges that makes all the difference

"As a small family business we instil our core values of integrity, honesty and trust into our pharmacies. We always ask our staff the question: if it was your family member would you be happy with the service given?"

However, it's not all change. Deepak and Natasha were keen to assure villagers that in the short term it is 'business as usual': "Nothing will change, but we do have some plans to help better support our community.

"The staff at Barnt Green are truly wonderful and as with any business changing from ownership from a large group to be independent, there is work to do.

"We will endeavour to review and implement changes for the better, no staff will be leaving, however we wouldn't do the pharmacy justice if we didn't review how things operate."

New hands: Deepak and Natasha pick up the keys to the pharmacy.

No time was wasted in implementing small changes to improve customer service and reduce waiting times by installing new technology in store.

In addition to the new computer, which should help to alleviate waiting times for prescriptions, they also plan to implement a confidential suggestion box which Deepak and Natasha will read, and any viable and practical suggestions will be taken on board. "If there is a service we are not offering and you want us to do it, please tell us," they say.

"We are working on possibly launching a delivery service in the future, and we are updating our suppliers so we can now get stock quicker and further reduce waiting times."

One of their biggest goals is to improve the community engagement in the village pharmacy: "During our time working in different pharmacies we developed a real passion for the community spirit and how a pharmacy is well placed to help patients at all stages of their life.

"A community pharmacy belongs to the patients and is a force for common good which we feel many have forgotten and this is one of the reasons why Barnt Green is perfect.

"There is a strong community spirit and everybody we have spoken to is always more than happy to help, really friendly and understanding while we look to engage the pharmacy to the local area.

"Because we live in the area and use the local amenities such as the schools and nursery, and the local shops, and know what village people need, we feel that we can deliver on a simple promise: To be the best pharmacy we can be for you."

Deepak and Natasha are dedicated to improve the customer experience and day-to-day running of the pharmacy, while encouraging the community spirit they are passionate about.

Though you may not see big changes immediately, behind the scenes there is plenty going on to ensure Barnt Green pharmacy is there and improving for the community.

"We wish all our patients past, present and future good health," the pair said, "however, we are here and happy to help, should you need us".

Village Valentines

HAVE you stopped saying "Happy New Year" to everyone, yet? At *The Village* we can't decide when it's polite to stop. Having said that, we are definitely read to look towards the rest of 2024 and hopefully see the back of the very, very freezing cold weather we've experienced lately.

Cold weather cracks lips, makes hands rough and skin dry. Make sure you're using all the lip balm, moisturiser, hand cream you can get your little chapped hands on! Or if you're feeling really fancy, book in to have a moisturising facial with your favourite beauty therapist.

The next "event" of 2024 is Valentine's Day. While we're not sure if we believe it's really a 'holiday', it's nice to have an excuse to get dressed up and go out for dinner (or dressed down for a takeaway!).

Valentine's Day is, however, a great reminder to give yourself some self-love. What relaxes you?

Take some time to treat yourself, whether that's a relaxing bubble bath with a candle and a book, or booking in for a massage for complete relaxation.

Or, if feeling completely smooth sounds good for Valentine's Day, check out some of the clinics offering IPL and hair removal treatments. Divine!

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VHK WOMENS HEALTH

Osteoporosis; a Hidden Disease

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Silent Diseases: Osteoporosis

VHK WOMENS HEALTH

This month, Dr Heidi Kerr and Dr Vicky Hobbs, from **VHK Women's Health Clinic**, explain how aging can impact our ability to heal and the importance of looking after our bones to maintain a healthy body and lifestyle.

Osteoporosis: A silent disease until a fall and fracture occurs. *Image: Shutterstock.*

AS we get older, the importance of looking after ourselves becomes more apparent.

We take certain parts of our body for granted, only discovering there is a problem when we experience a health problem and something goes wrong.

Our skeleton is a classic example of this, with up to 50% of women suffering a fragility fracture in their lifetime, compared to one in five men.

Osteoporosis is a skeletal disease that is caused by a reduction in bone density leading to a significant increased risk of fractures, known as fragility fracture.

The impact of breaking a bone is not only associated with personal costs, but massive socio-economic cost too.

It affects 3.5 million people in the UK and 10% of people who sustain a hip fracture in the UK die within one month of the event and 30% within 12 months, reflecting the impact this event can have on over all health.

Women are at greater risk than men, due to a decrease in oestrogen at menopause which accelerates bone loss and racially white women and men are more at risk of a fragility fracture compared with other ethnic groups.

There are many medical conditions associated with a higher risk of osteoporosis such as malabsorption gastrointestinal diseases like Crohn's and Coeliac disease and some medications given to treat other health conditions also increase the risk. Long use of steroids and some breast cancer treatments are two such examples.

Lifestyle is critical in terms of both increasing risk and risk reduction of osteoporosis.

Doing daily exercise in any form will help bone regeneration and reduce bone loss, and we would always encourage 150 minutes per week of any form of exercise that you enjoy, ideally with some variety of both strength work and fitness.

Not smoking or drinking more than three units of alcohol per day will all help to risk reduce, too. Ensuring a diet that contains both calcium and Vitamin D with nuts, seeds, oily fish, soya or tofu and dairy products can really boost your intake and also offers support to the gut microbiome.

Whist this is a silent disease until a fall and fracture occurs, there are risk stratification tools that can be used to assess the need for tests to look at bone density and good treatment options.

For women with early menopause HRT is a key treatment used to stabilise and improve bone density and HRT is also used for women who menopause at a normal age.

For women who cannot have hormone treatment, men and women diagnosed in old age there are a range of alternative treatments that can be given to build bone density and reduce the risk of fractures occurring.

At VHK Women's Health Clinic we can assess and advise on all aspects of menopause care including bone health and have appointments available at www.vhkwomenshealth.com

VHK are hosting an evening dedicated to menopause and osteoporosis health and would love for you to join us to learn, chat and raise awareness of these aspects of women's health. Please see page opposite for more details.

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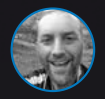

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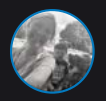

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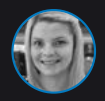

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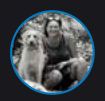

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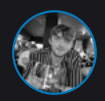

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Who wants to be rich?

REGULAR readers will know that the bedrock of our financial planning ethos at PPM is helping clients to work out how much they will need to tick all the boxes of their future needs and happiness – in other words, how much is "Enough".

It is not about blindly accumulating as much wealth as possible, because you will have no idea when you have enough; you will not know when, or even how, to stop.

At the same time there are a thousand tales from human history of how great riches are rarely the answer to life's big questions and will often bring along some big problems of their own.

This was brought home to me recently reading a blog by American behavioural finance expert Morgan Housel, author of the best-selling book *The Psychology of Money*.

He believes that while there are many ways to get rich – from exploiting great ideas to sheer luck – once people have become rich there are subtle downsides they will experience that are so common "you could call them the only true laws of getting rich".

Among the downsides to being rich Housel lists on his blog at *collabfund.com/blog/* are:

■ **It won't bring happiness:** He gives the example of actor Will Smith, who wrote in his autobiography that when he was poor and depressed he could dream about a future where he had more money and his problems have gone away. But when he was rich, he had all the money you could ever need, and he was still depressed.

He also quotes music producer Rick Rubin, saying: "It's hard to get really depressed until your dreams come true."

■ **It will fuel envy:** Housel quotes

Martin Pryor looks at the lessons we can all learn from the downsides of being very wealthy.

American essayist Henry David Thoreau: "Envy is the tax which all distinctions must pay."

■ **It will make you lonely:** You're suddenly surrounded by sycophants who are more interested in what they can get out of you than in you, yourself.

■ **You still worry about it:** What many people want really from money is to have enough of it to stop worrying about it. But once you have enough, the worry has become a habit and part of your identity and you can't stop, says Housel.

Financial planners often tell him that one of their biggest challenges is getting their clients to spend any money in retirement.

A lifetime of frugality and savings has become entrenched. Watching money compound gives them more pleasure than they would ever get spending it.

■ **You will still feel poor:** Expectations can rise faster than income, so a higher income just sends expectations spiraling out of control. As you get rich, you just become all the more aware of how much you lack in comparison with the super-rich.

Housel's final message is to know that no one is going to remember you in 100 years' time.

You may as well just focus on what's going to make you happy now and bear in mind the Scottish proverb: "Be happy while you're living, for you are a long time dead."

Reading Housel's blog reconfirms the importance of a good financial planner. We help clients to put their money into perspective.

We help clients to stop comparing themselves with others and instead encourage them to look inside of themselves to establish what truly makes them happy.

Once we get to the bottom of that we then help clients to monetise that perfect life so that we can help them to work out how much their "Enough" is.

All we need is Enough.

Drop us a note by email and we will explain our process and invite you to invest some time in yourselves to understand your money better. You can even start by asking yourself these three big questions. You may surprise yourself with the answers.

■ **If money were no object how would you live your life differently** (the lottery win question)**?**

■ **If you only had 12 months of healthy life left, how would you live the perfect year?**

■ **If you only had 24 hours of healthy life left, what would you regret you now no longer had time to do?**

Martin Pryor
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The Financial Conduct Authority does not regulate Tax Planning This article should not be regarded as personal advice. You should seek independent financial advice to apply these theories to your circumstances.

NEW YEAR'S OPTIMISM

Mark Meads tells us how **Village Financial** will support you with your mortgage needs as the housing market recovers.

AS we settle into the New Year we are starting to see some positive signs of recovery in the housing market and fixed rate deals with the lenders starting to reduce.

This is largely driven by increased optimism, as inflation is reducing and the hope that the Bank of England will start to consider reducing interest rates.

As a result we are seeing more people looking for help with their mortgage, whether it be first time buyers or those looking to move house or re-mortgage.

There are also more mortgage deals available in the buy-to-let market, with some lenders relaxing their criteria.

At Village Financial we can support you in all your mortgage needs and we are able to advise on mortgages for all adults of any age and circumstance.

We can also arrange new and review your existing life and critical illness policies to ensure you are getting the best value cover for your current circumstances.

Our promise to you is that we will make the process easier, we will liaise with your estate agents and lawyers as needed, we will keep you updated as your mortgage process progresses, we will help you every step of the way.

And rest assured once you become a client of ours we will be there every time your existing deal matures, we will contact you well in advance and ensure you get the right deal for your circumstances, at that point in your life.

Mark Meads (above), is here to help make sure you are on the right path with your mortgage.

If you would like an initial discussion to see how we can help, please contact us on: 0121 445 1227.
Or contact us through our website: www.villagefinancial.co.uk using the QR code

Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage

Supergiants in the sky

Amateur astronomer **Brian Watkiss** peers into the *Village* night sky.

FEBRUARY, when sunset starts to get a little later, even if only by half an hour or so. It does seem to lengthen the afternoons but we can still be out stargazing by 6.30pm.

At this time, Saturn is just disappearing into the sunset, with a very thin crescent Moon close by on the 11th.

Jupiter is still there though, high in the south and dominating the sky, being visited by the Moon on the 14th and 15th. It will be with us for another couple of months yet and makes a great starting point for finding our way around the night sky.

To the right, you can see the Great Square of Pegasus with the line of stars that is Andromeda attached to the top right hand corner.

Looking left from Jupiter though, we come to one of the most exciting parts of the night sky.

First of all, you may notice a little misty patch enclosing a few stars. These are the Pleiades or Seven Sisters because you can usually see the seven brightest stars.

The mistiness is from a cloud of gas and dust that the stars are passing through at about seven miles a second.

Take a bit of time to study this little star cluster and concentrate just to the left or right to really bring out the mistiness. This technique is known as "averted vision".

To the left and a little lower, a bright, reddish star sits in a "vee" of stars. This is Aldebaran, the big red eye of Taurus the Bull.

This is surrounded by a cluster of stars too but this is almost impossible to see in our light polluted skies.

Aldebaran is a huge Red Giant star, 44 times as big as our Sun but only about twice the mass, so nowhere near as dense.

Exciting sky: Stars larger than our sun…and misty clouds of gas and dust.
Images courtesy of NASA.

To the left and lower still is the large constellation of Orion. Very distinct and massive in the sky, it is unmistakable.

At the top left is Betelgeuse, another massive red giant or "supergiant" because it is so large. It is about 700 times as big as the Sun but, again, only about 15 times as massive. What is it with these giant stars?

Lower down, you can see Orion's belt (which doesn't contain a galaxy), with three stars hanging down forming his sword. There is a cloud of gas and dust around the middle of these stars too. Try the averted vision method to see this more distinctly.

Finally, at the bottom right is another bright star, Rigel. This doesn't have the red hue of Betelgeuse, in fact it is just the opposite. It is a blue supergiant with a diameter about 70 times that of the Sun. It is though, 20 times as massive so is a little more substantial. It has at least three smaller companions orbiting around it and is incredibly far away, so far that the light you are seeing set off at about the time Richard the Lionheart was being crowned king.

Not to be . . . this time: A vision of the Peregrine Lunar Lander on the surface of the Moon.

Nearer home, after a successful launch, the Peregrine Lunar Lander developed a fault and instead of being the first US-built lunar vehicle to land on the Moon since 1972, was redirected to burn up in the Earth's atmosphere. This was Peregrine Mission One, so we can now look forward to Mission Two.

WASHOUT ENDS 2023

Alvechurch amateur weatherman **Phil Thomas** records the changes.

DECEMBER started with a cold spell, with wet snow on the 2nd and 3rd. The snowfall overnight resulted in 2mm of wet snow at 9am.

Temperatures rose over the following days and it remained mostly mild, dull and wet for the rest of the month.

In fact, it was the fourth wettest month I've recorded in 33 years, with 174.3mm of rainfall.

The mild, very wet weather continued into the new year. January had 37.5mm of rain over the first two days of the month, however only 1.8mm was recorded since then (up to the 17th).

Temperatures decreased and became a lot colder into the middle of the month. The change in weather was due to a high pressure area to the West of the UK which blocked any rain systems reaching the UK.

Last year was the second wettest in my rainfall records between 1991-2023, with 1082.5mm of rainfall. The wettest was 2012 (1126.3mm) .

The Outlook

AS we approach the end of January and into early February, there is an increased likelihood of high pressure having a greater influence on UK weather patterns.

This high pressure increases the likelihood of drier conditions becoming established and there is also an increased likelihood of winds from the north or east.

This in turn, could lead to an increased chance of cold spells.

While February is likely to be drier and colder, there remains a lower chance of milder interludes with spells of rain and strong winds.

It looks like a very blustery February is on its way. . .

Just a bit of rain: Flooding in January.

Above: A tree blown down by the wind blocks the road in Barnt Green

Above: A robin perches on a wall.

The Year 2023

Mean Max	14.9C	0.8C above average
Mean Min	7.1C	0.8C above average
Mean	10.8C	0.8C above average
Rainfall	1082.5mm	129% of average
Sunshine	1479.5hrs	106% of average

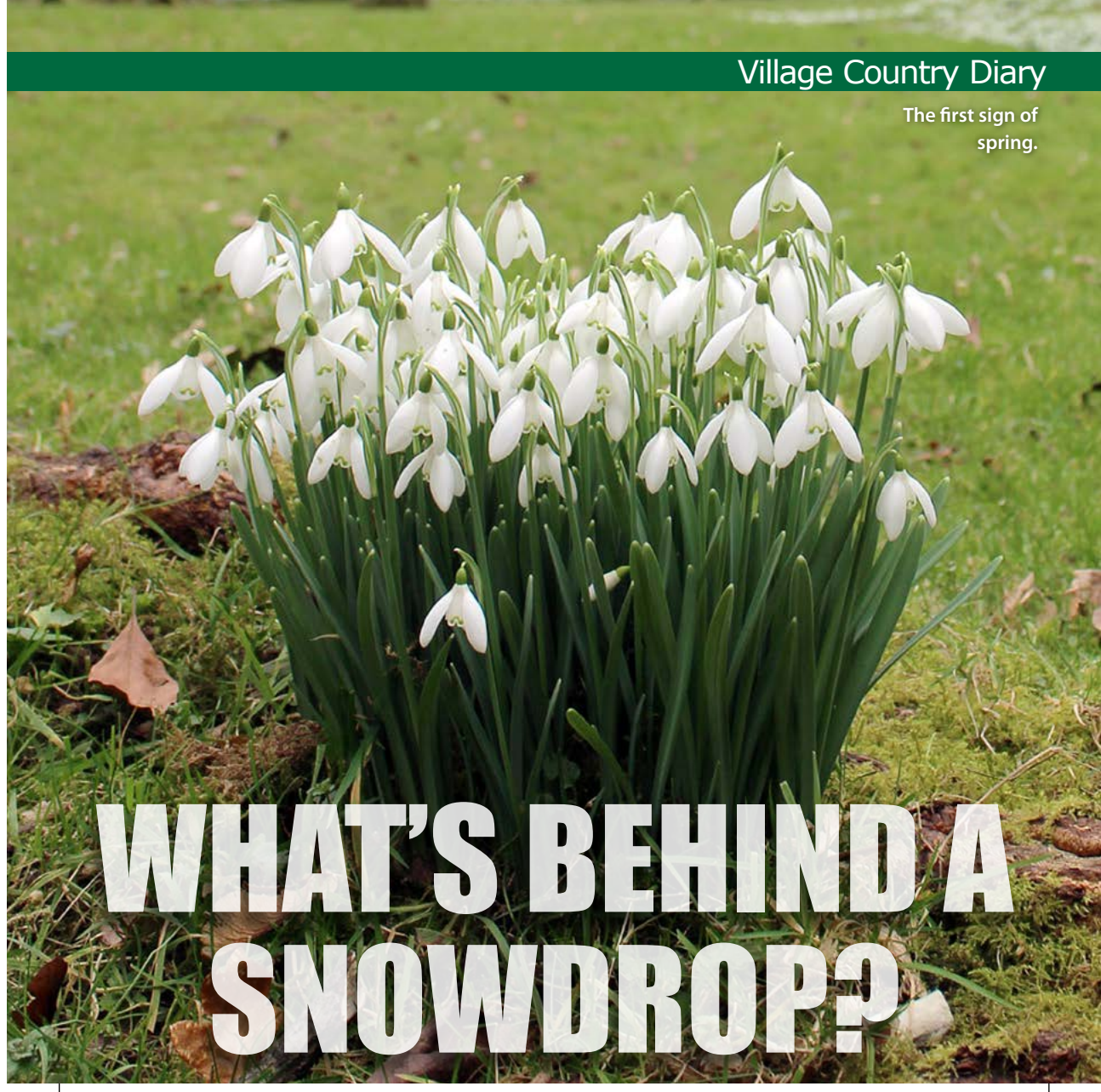
December 2023

Mean Max	9.2C	1.7C above average
Mean Min	4.4C	2.6C above average
Mean	6.8C	2.2C above average
Rainfall	174.3mm	211% of average
Sunshine	31.9hrs	54% of average

January 2023 (to 17th)

Mean Max	5.9C	1.1C below average
Mean Min	1.6C	0.1C below average
Mean	3.9C	0.5C below average
Rainfall	39.3mm	53% of average
Sunshine	39.6hrs	54% of average

More information at ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com*** You can see an improved HD weather-cam, updated at one-minute intervals, at: ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com/webcam_alvechurch.php***



The first sign of spring.

WHAT'S BEHIND A SNOWDROP?

Mary Green looks at the five kingdoms of the natural world and how they interact with us and each other.

BACK in the autumn, a friend asked me what some little flies he saw everywhere were. You probably remember them – there was a veritable plague of them, little white things that look like tiny moths. They come every year.

They are cabbage white-flies (not to be confused with greenhouse whiteflies – or indeed with cabbage white butterflies!). Though they look like a little moth and are called flies, they are in fact a type of bug.

We use the word "bug" in common speech to mean any little insect or even bacteria, but technically it is a type of insect similar to beetles but usually smaller.

There are lots of bug species and many feed on particular plants – like this one, which feeds on the cabbage or Brassica family, and the hawthorn shieldbug, gorse shieldbug and sloe bug, for example.

This made me think about how complicated the way we classify things in the world around us is, and often how differently we talk of them in ordinary

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language. However, the more you know about that natural world the more you see.

So I thought I'd start the year with a look at how we name and classify creatures.

First of all, the natural world is divided into five "kingdoms" – a strange old word. There is the animal kingdom, including us, then plants, fungi and two others: Protista and Monera, organisms with one cell or very simple groups of cells – such as bacteria.

Sometimes the living world is shown in diagram form as a kind of tree, with these five branches coming out and then sub-dividing into smaller branches and then twigs.

What surprises some people here is that fungi are not plants. They are often included in "plant-based diets" but are a very different kind of creature. Until recent times they were thought of as plants, and there is much new research on the strange lives of fungi.

The animal kingdom is the one we seem to know best and study most, probably because we're in it.

It has many different subdivisions within it – mammals, reptiles, birds, fish, insects, invertebrates being the best known. In previous centuries they were seen as a kind of hierarchy – an order of importance. They were all more important than plants. But mammals were at the top, then birds and reptiles, then insect and lastly invertebrates and any other smaller creatures.

In medieval times in our culture "Man" stood above the other mammals, the angels above Man and God above all. It's worth noting that this isn't so in all cultures – in many native American and Australasian cultures, people are seen as more intimately related to the rest of creation and not as "the top".

Nowadays we know that it isn't like that. If anything, the creatures which used to be at the bottom are now known to be of vital importance to our survival. It's probably the belief that we are at the top that has led us to treat the planet so badly.

Bee-pollenated and wind-pollenated flowers.

Fungi are not plants, but grow with them.

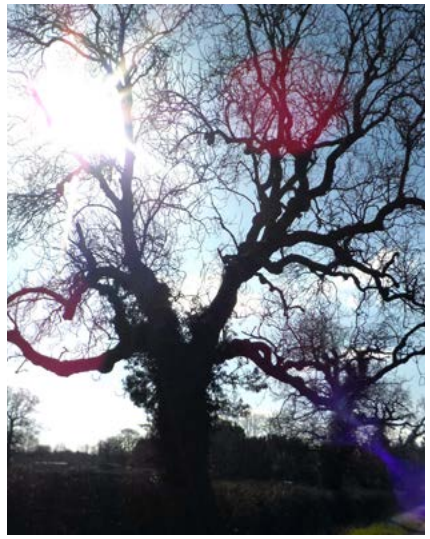
Squirrels and oaks need each other.

I'm not talking about gardening, but about maintaining natural complexes of plants. They will grow quite happily without us but it's easy for us to harm them without meaning to or to let them be destroyed without realising it.

Of course, plants can't live without animals. They need insects to pollinate, birds and mammals to spread seeds, and grazing animals to maintain the balance of plants. All the kingdoms are needed together.

The main difference between plants and animals I suppose is that plants don't move much. They live with their roots in the earth and in most cases survive year after year, coming up to flower and seed and then drawing back down to the roots. They take in carbon from the air and store it in their roots. All plants do this, not just trees. In return they give off oxygen, which we need to breathe.

It's strange to learn that the first



A winter oak shows its shape.

plants didn't have roots of their own but grew from underground fungi.

After developing roots they still need to interact with fungal networks. Some can grow with many different fungi, but some can only become established on specific fungi. Examples are orchids, notoriously difficult to transplant.

Plants and fungi depend on each other underground. So you can see that any digging over of the soil not only releases carbon but can destroy these networks.

If a plant is cut off it will generally grow back, and during this it is not putting down roots much.

So, grass and flowers cut as a lawn don't absorb so much carbon or contribute so much to the complexity of soil structure.

Hedges that are flailed do not root properly as well as losing their flowers and seeds. Uncut vegetation helps to stabilise soil and prevent both flooding and drying out.

All plants have their own ways of growing together and in sequence following each other. They have regular structures, often in complex symmetrical patterns, and form an interdependent network of great variety.

This is why I don't like to use the term "wild nature". It isn't wild in the sense of being untidy or unstructured. It follows its own natural patterns,

Above: Oaks grow among thorns.
Right: An oak grows among other plants.

Long-surviving seeds: Annual poppies grow on cultivated land.

though we may not always see them. Unfortunately, we do interfere with them, trying to impose our own human sense of tidiness and beauty.

Many of our ancient oak trees are not the shape they should be as they have had branches lopped off at various times. The best have lower branches reaching out and down to the ground, and roots which spread equally far underground.

Similarly, we tend to separate out "important" plants from their accompanying plants (which we often call weeds). Young trees naturally grow surrounded by bushes, briars and herbal plants, which help protect them and aid their root establishment. ("The thorn is mother of the oak").

People tend to strip these plants away, mistaking the complementary way plants grow for competition.

Where some plants become over dominant it is usually because we have disturbed the balance. A good example of this is ivy. This is a vital plant for its late nectar and berries. It is not parasitic and doesn't harm trees unless they are already damaged or dying. But if we over-cut a hedge the ivy will take over and may prevent the slower-growing hedge trees coming back.

One of the groupings of plants is into annuals and perennials. Nearly all our native plants are perennials, coming back every year.

Some can live for thousands of years. However, a small number are annual, coming up from seed, growing, flowering and shedding seeds, then dying. These generally only grow on bare or broken soil, which is rare in natural settings. They would originally have grown where animals broke the soil or after a fire.

Then they had a field day (literally) when humans started ploughing the land. Now they are more scarce again as we weed-kill them.

They still follow our wars though, the best-known example being the Flanders poppies. Their seeds can

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survive underground for decades, waiting for the soil to be broken. But these flowers are naturally quite rare in Britain despite being in lots of "wildflower mixes". They tend to be very brightly-coloured and scented, often short-lived, as they live simply to became pollinated. However, they don't contribute so well to the network of plants and fungal systems underground.

So, plants growing together in their natural patterns and allowed to flower and fruit and die back naturally (or shed their leaves in the case of trees) are something we can all help to flourish.

At this time of year, most of the flowering plants have other ways of reproducing as well as by seed. There are few insects around to pollinate them.

They have ways of protecting their flowers from sudden snow, frost or rain. Trees that flower early, like hazel, are wind-pollinated.

The first snowdrops come. They are bulbs, and bulbs can reproduce through division. Snowdrops spread underground more then by seed. They hang down, protecting the valuable pollen.

Snowdrops among fallen leaves.

Like many bulbs, they contain a poisonous chemical which stops mammals eating them. This poison can be used as a drug – galanthine - and has been experimented with for dementia.

Plants produce chemicals to compensate for not being able to move away from danger.

A snowdrop is in the plant kingdom, a perennial herbal plant (i.e. not a tree) of a type called monocotyledons (more about them next month!).

It is in the Lily family and has the botanical name *Galanthus nivalis*. *Galanthus* is its genus and nivalis the species. The name means milky snow-flower. The English name snowdrop is self-explanatory.

Snowdrops are not ancient wild flowers but came into Britain from the near continent at some point and are established in the wild now. They grow well in woodland before the trees have leaves so they get the light. They are old enough to have become associated with Candlemas or St Brigid's day at the start of February, so are also known locally as Candlemas bells. They mark the start of spring. Next time I'll write about some of their relatives which come in spring.

■ **Here's a poem (right) I wrote in January last year.**

Above: Ivy is a vital winter food for the wood pigeon.
Below: Snodrops growing wild in Chance Woods.

Scarfield Dingle

Here I always pause, lean on the brickwork
Look at the ancient oak. With others
I talk about the mother of all oaks
And how her roots reach under the canal
Her family stretching up the dingle, linked
With the bluebells and the ant hills and the turf.
Today, alone, I stand a while and look
At her form, now naked in the winter sun.
Every twig on every branch individual
But all in harmony with the treeshape whole
The lower branches almost in the ground
The upper sections curling at the ends
A symmetry, but not of our making.
It is like music. I recognise each note
But hear the orchestra in its complexity.
This above all connects my brain and heart.

The anonymous birder

How to enjoy village birdlife

'Angry pigeon' or a raptor?

WITH the exception of buzzards, which are now common, an encounter with a bird of prey – or raptor – has a frisson of excitement and the novelty of the rare.

However, amongst friends and acquaintances, there does seem to be some confusion regarding what they've had an encounter with. . .

"I think we had a merlin in the garden."

"A peregrine swooped down in front of the car."

And my favourite: "I don't know what it was, but it looked like an angry pigeon."

We need to clear this up because when you know what you are looking at, and looking for, you'll be amazed at how often you spot a raptor unbeknown to all around you.

Maybe you'll be fortunate to witness a fleeting moment of incredible grace and power as a top predator fulfills it's genetic destiny. . . or, mostly, it will be just a big old bird sitting motionless on a post.

We'll get the occasional fork tailed red kite out of the way early but to simplify, on our patch, we are most likely to see just three main species:

■ A buzzard, the big, gliding one.
■ A kestrel, the hovering one.
■ A sparrowhawk, the stealth fighter one.

Sparrowhawks are most likely to be seen in the garden and suburban areas thanks to our birdfeeders supplying a useful pick-and-mix for a bird which will need several small feather-covered meals per day to survive.

They are easily seen at height, noticeably smaller than a buzzard, with their flap-flap-glide flight pattern.

They will usually be accompanied by agitating corvids and their presence is also signalled by serial panickers – wood pigeons and other small birds suddenly departing sharpish in all directions.

Dinner time: A sparrowhawk eating a starling on an Alvechurch lawn.
Picture by Andy Parker

To witness a sparrowhawk attack is a rare sight as they will approach their target at high speed, hugging hedge and fence tops, homing in under the radar only to pop out and stun their prey with strong talons. Over in a flash but only successful in about one out of ten attempts.

The aftermath is less frenetic as they will shield their quarry with their wings known as "mantling".

This falconry term gave us mantlepiece, as did to be "fed up" which refers to a hawk's torpor on a full stomach.

A Sparrowhawk's long yellow legs are a good identifying feature too if seen stationary and it is worth noting that the female is considerably larger than the male. It is thought this helps repel unwanted visitors to the nest when incubating. This is common in other raptors too.

The kestrel is now mostly seen hovering over motorway verges. It prefers rodents, particularly voles, and will favour rough grassland for hunting, so it is unlikely to be seen in gardens.

As it is a falcon it will have pointed wings whereas a hawk has "fingers" at the end of a broader wing.

Kestrels nest in tree cavities or on buildings, as do peregrine falcons which have nested in the city centre on cathedral spires and also the Dunlop Fort building, or cliffs of human origin if you are a falcon.

That just leaves the buzzard or the "tourist's eagle". Like a flying fox they are unfussy, opportunist eaters, consuming most things from worms to rabbits. They will also eat the off-spring of other birds including birds of prey if given the chance.

They have a distinctive call known as mewing and can be seen hovering on thermals, engaging in display flight when pairing up or surveying their territory. They also like to sit on posts, telegraph poles etc.

All birds, but particularly larger birds, will only expend energy if they have to.

The increase in numbers of buzzard and sparrowhawk, less so kestrels, represents a success story in the otherwise dwindling trend of bird populations.

Years of pesticide use getting in to the food chain and persecution had catastrophic results on raptor numbers, having many and varied ecological knock-on effects.

Fruit farmers in Worcestershire from the 1950s through to the 1970s would have suffered from an over abundance of fruit-bud consuming bullfinches until harmful pesticides were banned and some balance was restored.

It is worth remembering that the presence of raptors isn't a threat to other bird populations, indeed their presence is usually a sign of a good ecosystem: no prey equals no birds of prey.

Hopefully, the only angry pigeon you'll see from now on will be being chased by a sparrowhawk.

JL

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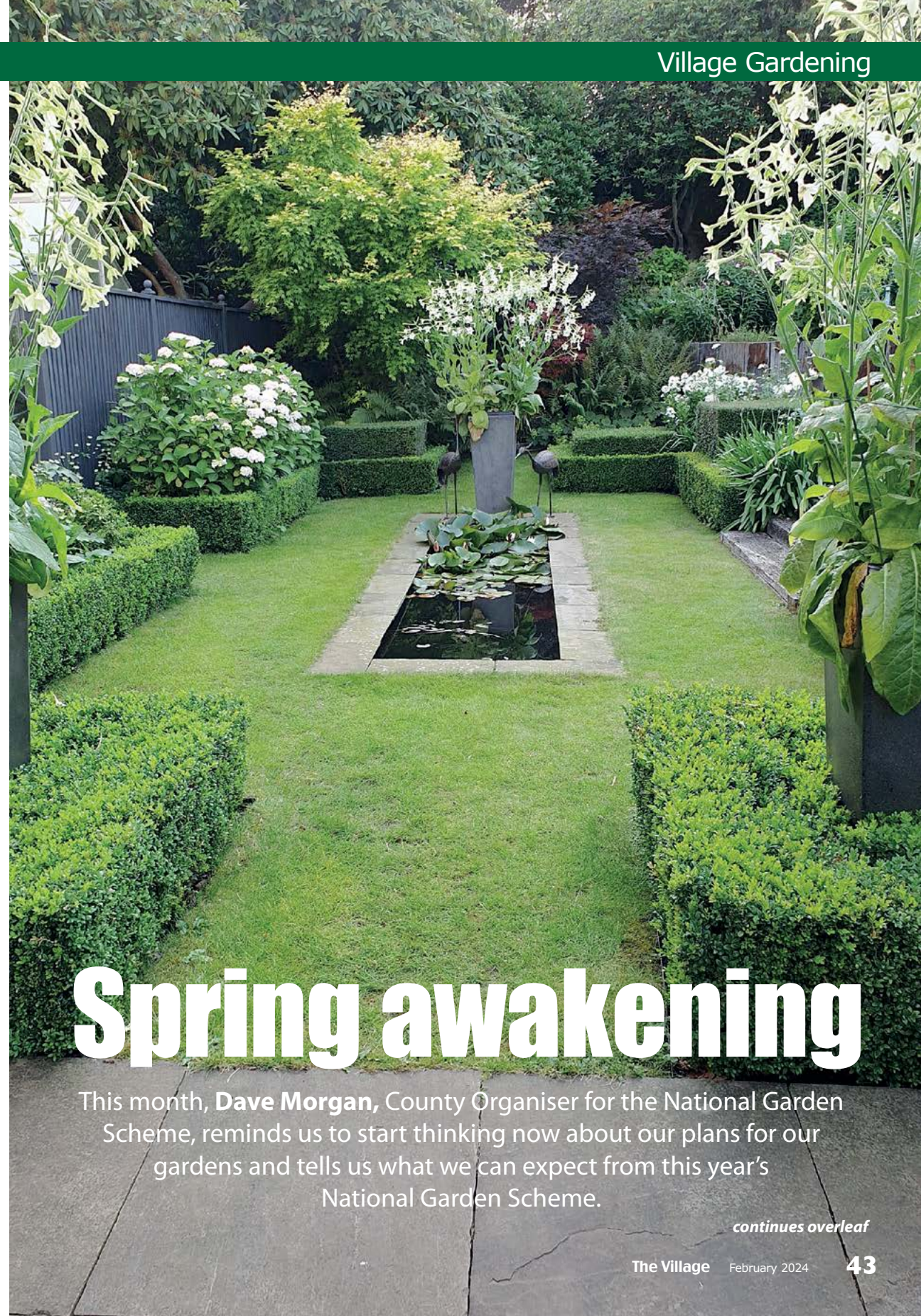

Spring awakening

This month, **Dave Morgan,** County Organiser for the National Garden Scheme, reminds us to start thinking now about our plans for our gardens and tells us what we can expect from this year's National Garden Scheme.

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SOMEONE once said, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy planning more important things!"

We do seem to spend a lot of time planning. We plan for our holidays as early as Christmas (hence all the holiday adverts whilst we're stuffing ourselves with mince pies) and if the retail companies had their way, we would be planning Christmas present lists whilst soaking up the sun (or perhaps just getting soaked) at the seaside in July!

In fact one company actually advertised a "Christmas Plan" ready for December 25th 2024 before we had even reached Christmas 2023!

If you're lucky enough to have a garden – regardless of how large or small – there are many ways to enjoy it, and most need a little bit of planning. That might be which bulbs to plant in autumn or which seeds to sow in the winter. as the days start to get lighter and hopefully the weather starts to warm up – despite what Michael Flanders and Donald Swann sang, "January brings the snow, makes your feet and fingers glow. February's ice and sleet freeze the toes right off your feet."

For some folks, the planning is all about how to create that new pool or patio that you've always wanted or even which new barbecue set to buy so that you can entertain family and friends in the spring and summer.

But have you ever thought of planning your garden visiting with the aid of the National Garden Scheme Worcestershire Leaflet or website?

If you don't some great opportunities to visit some wonderful gardens in the area could easily be missed.

The National Garden Scheme (or "NGS") can trace its history back to the late 1850s when a Liverpool merchant and one time MP; William Rathbone, employed a nurse to look after his wife at home during her final illness.

Oak Tree House: A paradrise for plant-lovers, open in May, in Marlbrook.

This led to the start of District Nursing and the creation of the Queens Nursing Institute (QNI) to co-ordinate the nurses.

By 1926 the QNI were short of money, and a member of their council, Elsie Wagg, came up with the idea of raising money for the scheme through persuading owners of large gardens to open for the public for one shilling (5p) per person.

A year later, in 1927, the National Garden Scheme was founded (although then it was a sub-division of the QNI rather than a separate charity) and 609 gardens opened raising £8,191.

Amongst those 609 were the gardens at Worcestershire's Spetchley Park, who have opened for the NGS every year since, and the gardens at King George V's Sandringham.

In 2023 the NGS raised £3.4million for a variety of charities including six regular beneficiaries like Marie Curie and Macmillan's plus the original QNI and a variety of other gardens and healthcare charities, through an array of fabulous gardens, many a lot smaller than the 30 acres at Spetchley, and in 2024 there will be several open in our area.

Elsie Wagg: The original idea behind the open gardens scheme.
Image supplied by the NGS

So perhaps now is the best time to start planning your visits.

One such garden is 2 Brookwood Drive in Barnt Green, owned by Mike and Liz Finlay, a multi-themed mature garden with numerous water features and colourful borders.

There is a formal white garden, wildlife pond and cutting garden surrounded by large rhododendrons providing a colourful display in late spring. This garden opens in May and June.

Holly Cottage: Explore what this new garden has to offer in June, located in Beoley.

Another is Oak Tree House in Marlbrook, open twice in May, which is a plantsperson's cottage garden overflowing with plants, pots and interesting artifacts and spring colour with azaleas, rhododendrons and acers.

Both of these gardens also open for private bookings for small to medium sized groups.

2024 also sees the welcome return of two very diverse but popular gardens that were not open in 2023.

The first: Pump Cottage in Weatheroak, an enchanting romantic one acre plantaholic's garden with roses, a rockery, fernery, water features and a natural pond and wildlife area.

74 Meadow Road (now renamed "Joe's Garden") in Wythall is the other, a most unusual urban garden dedicated to woodland and shade-loving plants including a few tropical and foreign species.

Both gardens have been featured on BBC garden programs in the past, Pump House on Carol Klein's "Open Gardens" on BBC2 and Joe's Garden on "Gardeners' World".

These two gardens are now opening together as a small group under the name of "Weatheroak and Wythall Gardens" in July, together with The Pond House which is directly opposite Pump Cottage.

The Pond House boasts 1.5 acres of developing gardens including a split level topiary garden with herbaceous borders, leading to a large natural wildlife pond with woodland walk.

Another new local garden for 2024 is Holly Cottage in Beoley, a half-acre garden open in June and featuring cottage, jungle and formal gardens, a small orchard and a wildlife pond, together with some far reaching views.

There's also always the popular eight acre Morton Hall Gardens, in Holberrow Green which is perched on an escarpment with breath-taking views over unspoilt Worcestershire countryside, open for the NGS in August.

But don't just plan for local gardens as there are plenty of other fascinating gardens in Worcestershire, and beyond, many of which also offer coffee or tea with home made cakes, which keeps me returning to them!

All the information you need is in the yellow leaflets available from garden centres and tourist information centres and online at www.ngs.org.uk – so get planning!

Village What's On

WHAT'S ON GUIDE

BEOLEY SNOWDROP WEEKEND

ST Leonard's Church in Beoley, will be holding its annual Snowdrop Weekend in February. Take the opportunity to visit the beautiful church and hundreds of pristine snowdrops that spring up across the grounds.

This year, you can visit on Saturday 10 February between 10am-4pm and Sunday 11 February 1pm-4pm.

Find out more at www.stleonardsbeoley.org.uk

EVENTS

THE MIDLAND SINFONIA'S first concert of 2024 is 'THE HILLS ARE ALIVE' at 7.30 on 3rd February in the Ark at St Laurence Church Alvechurch. The programme inspired by mountains and landscapes will include Scenes from the Scottish Highlands by Granville Bantock, music from Rodger and Hammerstein's Sound of Music and Holst's Brook Green Suite. Tickets: £13 (£3 students and under 16) from The Lounge and Gin & Pickles Alvechurch and on line midlandsinfonia.co.uk. On the door £15 (£3) card or cash.
They annual general knowledge quiz & supper will be on 24th February the Ark St Laurence Church Alvechurch. Must be pre-booked, teams maximum 6, £12pp. Information and booking see www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk
Their young musicians' showcase will be held on 17th March St Laurence Church Alvechurch at 3pm www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk

THE ASKLEPIOS ORCHESTRA, conducted by Lee Armstrong, will give their Spring Concert on Sunday 24th March 2024 at 7.30pm in St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green, B45 8NR. The interesting programme will include:- Liszt, arr. Armstrong - Ave stella maris; Downes - Lento molto from Symphony No.2; Coates - Miniature Suite; Beethoven Symphony No.3 Op.55 'Eroica'. Admission is free, and donations to the retiring collection are much appreciated. You are invited to come along, and bring your friends. Save the Date for their Summer Concert, which will be on 30th June 2024 in the same venue.

MUSIC

ALVECHURCH COMMUNITY CHOIR usually meets in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mondays at 7.30pm with occasional pub and outdoor sessions and a live stream. The choir is inclusive and open to everyone, whether you think you can sing or not. For more information or to join or book us, see our website www.alvechurchcommunitychoir.org.uk. They are in the Village Hall every Monday in February except the 12th and are singing at the Alvechurch wassail on 3 February.

BEOLEY VILLAGE HALL hosts live music, comedy, cinema and jazz nights. On Wednesday Jazz nights the bar opens at 7.45pm, with entertainment from 8.15pm.
For Friday night events, the bar opens at 7pm with entertainment from 7.30pm, and on Saturdays the bar opens at 7.15pm with entertainment from 8pm.
For more information and details, contact Paul on 07973 759340 or Richard 01527 66646. The programme is subject to change if the circumstances dictate.

BEL CANTO SINGERS, the well-known 4-part Worcestershire choir, are back to rehearsals at St. John's Church, Greenlands Avenue Redditch B98 7PZ on Monday evenings. They are always happy to welcome new singers. They have a very wide and varied repertoire and a huge catalogue to include pop, fun pieces, musical theatre, jazz, folk music and traditional choral and classical mu sic along with much more.
Bel Canto Singers are a friendly and social group, under the guidance of Musical Director, Liz Green and accompanist, Wendy Quirk. They are a non-profit making organisation and select a new charity each year to support both financially and with provision of their services. Just turn up at rehearsal on Mondays at 7.30pm where there will be a wide range of singing activities, light refreshments and chat. More information please contact Secretary Veronica Porter 07885 507899 or visit www.belcantosingers.org.uk

THE GEMINI Choir is seeking new singers. Info from Philip Morris on 07969 741137.

BLACKWELL Concert Band and Training Band is open to all brass and woodwind players of all abilities. To learn more about the band, book them, or find details of upcoming events, email blackwellconcertband98@gmail.com or visit www.blackwellconcertband.co.uk

SINGING For Health is a group aimed specifically at people with health problems, mental or physical. Face to face groups have now resumed, meeting on Wednesdays 2-3pm at Longbridge Retirement Village and Thursdays 2-3pm at St Chad's Church, Rubery (£3 per session). Everyone is welcome!

BROMSGROVE Music Centre runs FREE weekly string orchestra, concert band and beginner group Lift Off! sessions for young musicians. . New members always welcome! Sessions are run by Severn Arts at St John's Middle School, Bromsgrove, on Mondays 5.45–6.45pm Individual instrumental lessons are also provided at the centre. For more info, see www.severnarts.org.uk/music-centre-groups

BROMSGROVE Folk Club meets on the second and last Thurs every month at Catshill Club, starting at 8pm. For a full list of events call Bob Bignell on 0121 476 5938 or see www.bromsgrovefolkclub.co.uk

BROMSGROVE Rock Choir offers everyone the chance to sing pop, rock and chart songs – no audition needed. Free taster sessions available.
More info at www.rockchoir.com or on 01252 714276.

BROMSGROVE Community Choir meets on Thurs evenings, 6–7 pm at Bromsgrove Methodist Church (main church hall). They sing for fun and enjoyment; everyone welcome, singers or not. Contact Ruth Henley for details on 01527 527022 or 07812 145267, or email r.g.henley@btinternet.com

BARNT GREEN CHORAL SOCIETY meets in the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, on Mondays from 7.45 - 9.45pm. The choir sings a range of music throughout the year, performing at least 3 concerts. New singers are always welcome and there is no need to audition! For more information, see barntgreenchoralsociety.org or facebook.com/barntgreenchoralsociety.

DANCING

TANGO ARGENTINO at Barnt Green Quakers/Friends Meeting House on Saturday mornings and Thursday evenings. For further information: www.facebook.com/groups/tango42/announcements (no Facebook account needed).

AELFGYTHE Border Morris is seeking new dancers (female) and musicians (male or female) to join them for fun, exercise and dancing. They meet at 7.45pm every Weds in Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall. Everyone welcome. Come and play traditional folk music, or try Morris dancing. For more details call Pam on 07961 830 831.

FRENCH & Breton folk dancing meets at Alvechurch Village Hall on the first Sat each month from 2.30–5pm (Covid-dependent, so please check first by emailing alvechurchfrenchdance@gmail.com). Informal tuition and live music provided. New dancers (and musicians) welcome. £2 per session.

SEQUENCE Ballroom and Latin dancing every Mon evening at 8pm at the Longbridge Social Club, 1012 Bristol Road South, Northfield. Occasional free tuition. All welcome to a friendly fun-filled dance. Details from Kalvin on 07725 265024.

ALVECHURCH Morris Men are on the lookout for new dancers and musicians. They practise on Mondays at Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall, 8.30–10pm, followed by a "debrief" at a local hostelry. They dance in local towns and at various local and national events, and perform a world-famous (sort of) mummers play in the village every New Year's Day. No ability, fitness or co-ordination required – if you are male, 18+ and prepared to spend more time than is probably good for you in public houses, pop along to meet the group!
Drop in to any practice, contact Steve on 07375 592928 or email: alvechurchbagman@gmail.com

NANCY Butterfly Morris Dancers dance in the North-West Morris style (clogs!) and practise at Catshill Methodist Church Hall on Monday evenings ready to meet up with other Morris sides for social events and festivals. They are very happy to welcome new adult dancers and musicians. See: www.nancybutterfly.co.uk or Facebook for what they get up to. You can contact them via the website or Jane on 07726 915289.

AVONCROFT Folk Dance Group enjoys anything from barn dances to ones seen in *Pride & Prejudice* or *Poldark*. All welcome, no need to have a partner. The group meets every Thurs from 8–10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. £2.50 incl refreshments. Info from Liz Stanton on 01905 353995 or liz@the-stantons.uk or visit www.avoncroftfdg.weebly.com

BJ's BUSY Boots Line Dancing Classes: Tues 2–3pm Bromsgrove Leisure Centre; 7–10pm Stoke Prior Sports/Country Club. Thurs 1.15–3.30pm Bromsgrove Methodist Church Centre. Social Dance usually 1st Sat in month at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane. It's a fun way to exercise. For more details phone Brenda on 01527 870151.

AMY GREAVES SCHOOL OF DANCE & Fitness offers a variety of classes for toddler up to adults. Based in Hopwood, Bournville and Longbridge. Contact 07979408997 amygreaves1@hotmail.co.uk www.amygreavesschoolofdance.com

SEQUENCE dancing every Tuesday evening at 8pm at Fairfield Village Hall, Bromsgrove. Welcoming and friendly atmosphere, all levels welcome. For further details please contact Joyce & Len on 0121 682 3266.

DANCE AND FITNESS at Bournheath Village Hall including Adult Zumba, Pilates and Stretch classes as well as KS1 and Baby Ballet. For more information message 'Dance With Nikki' on social media or n.foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

LINEDANCE CLASS, every Thursday between 6pm - 7pm at Extracare Longbridge Village. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

BEGINNERS LINEDANCE class, Tuesdays 6pm - 7pm at West Heath Community Centre, Hamstead House, B31 3QY. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

NEW SALSA dance classes, every Thursday at the Alvechruch Inn, B48 7LD. Doors open at 6pm. Beginners classes at 7pm, with the main class at 8pm. All classes are £9 each or both classes for £15. Come on your own or with friends. Contact 07779686679.

BALLROOM/LATIN SEQUENCE dance some line dance held on the first Friday of the month (check just in case Friday has to change because of commitments in the village) from 8pm -10.30pm at Extracare Longbridge Village, B31 2FZ. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

CLUBS, GROUPS & SOCIETIES

ST GODWALD'S Community Cafe meets every other Fri from 10am–noon at St Godwald's Room adjacent to the Church Hall, Finstall Road, Bromsgrove. Friendship, cake, tea/coffee. Donations welcome— monies to St Basil's charity for homeless youngsters. More info: davidrowe876@btinternet.com

BROMSGROVE Men In Sheds is a group for anyone (male or female) who has retired or been made redundant and wants to spend time with like-minded people. The group meets Mon–Thurs, 10am–2pm at Unit 1, Metals & Ores Industrial Estate, Stoke Prior B60 4JZ. You can find more information by calling 01527 570490 or email enquiries@ageukbrwf.org.uk

BARNT GREEN QUAKERS invite you to their autumn film screenings. Admission is free however donations are welcome. Full details can be found at The Meeting House, 6 Sandhills Rd, Barnt Green.
On 17th February it will be a 2016 musical romance: a struggling jazz pianist and aspiring actress fall in love while attempting to reconcile their career aspirations
On 16th March the film will be set in 1931 Paris: an orphan living in the walls of a train station gets wrapped up in a mystery involving his late father and an automaton. Homage to early filmmaker, Georges Méliès.

PLACES OF WELCOME is a growing network of local community groups who provide their neighbourhoods with places where all people can feel safe and where they can connect, belong and contribute. The network is open in St Laurence Church and The Ark on Wednesdays 10.30am-12pm, all are open to everyone and offer friendship and hospitality, free refreshments and local knowledge about the neighbourhood. Visit www.placesofwelcome.org.uk or email info@placesofwelcome.org.uk

REDDITCH Military History Society usually meets monthly in St Luke's Church Hall (Evesham Road, Redditch, B97 4JX), 7 for 7.30pm. More info from Ron on 01527 545450 or ronnieg33b@hotmail.co.uk

FRIENDS Of Bittell Reservoirs is a group of local people interested in preserving the natural environment of the Site of Special Scientific Interest at Upper Bittell, Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub reservoirs, which are important staging posts for migrant birds and wildlife. If you have an interest in preserving this unique environment and would like to help in its preservation and maintenance, contact: Charles Deverill on cdjd26@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY runs a regular programme of social events and guided walks, as well as maintaining local footpaths. Talks and social events are held in the Village Hall, unless otherwise noted. Entry at talks

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and AGM is free for members and £1 for guests, including a drink and biscuits. Litter picks start at 10am. from the village square. Other social events are by ticket and details of venue, start time and price will be published by the organisers nearer the time.
On Wed 21 February at 7:30 pm. There will be a talk "The night sky": a talk and demonstration by David Jones from the Bromsgrove Astronomical Society. Please bring a coat and hat as, if the weather is suitable, David will provide a star-watching session outside.

The Society's Annual General Meeting will be held on Wed 20 March at 7:30 pm. This meeting is open to all, and is held in the Village Hall. Any members of the Society who wish to join the committee for the coming year should contact one of the current officers prior to the AGM.

REDDITCH Community Shed is a project that encourages skills, combats loneliness, and provides a sense of worth in people who are retired or otherwise wondering what to do with themselves. They have a small woodworking work shop in the Kingfisher Centre just outside Primark and they are open Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Call in for tea and biscuits and a look round. More details at www.RedditchCommunityShed.co.uk or on FaceBook. If you're in Redditch of a Tuesday or Thursday they would be pleased to see you.

THE MONDAY Fellowship group meets at the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church in Barnt Green at 2.30pm on the second Monday every month; £2 to include tea and biscuits and an interesting talk. Info: Maureen Frowley on 0121 445 0880.

INNER WHEEL Club of Redditch welcomes you to its monthly meetings on 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Southcrest Hotel Redditch. An international Women's Organisation, they enjoy a bit of everything; walks, talks, days & evenings out, and everything in between whilst at the same time helping the community. Contact Anne Robertson for information 07580351361. Or email redditch.innerwheel@gmail.com or visit www.innerwheel.co.uk

BROMSGROVE U3A: No longer in full time work? Activity/interest groups and speaker meetings are happening throughout the month. Check website for details: www.u3asites.org.uk/bromsgrove/home

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Welcomes Refugees is a group of volunteers supporting local refugees who arrived under the government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). New volunteers always needed – training and support given. BRWR is open to all, irrespective of political or religious belief. Full details at www.brwr.uk

CATSHILL Carers and Bereavement Back Up Group is a group set up specifically to offer respite, socialising and occasional speakers to carers and bereaved in the area. It meets on the last Tues each month in the coffee bar area of Catshill Methodist Church Centre in Golden Cross Lane from 2.30pm for about 1.5hrs. All carers and bereaved welcome, as well as those who used to care for someone who has passed away or is now in a care facility. Tea and biscuits/cake provided – no charge. Contact Di (0121 445 3595) for details and encouragement.

BROMSGROVE Speakers Club meets at The Barn at The Bell at Belbroughton every other Tues, 7.45–10pm. Everyone who wants to gain confidence in public speaking is welcome, but you must book in advance via www.bromsgrovespeakers.org.uk, which also contains full details of events.

RE-ENGAGE (formerly Contact the Elderly) aims to help isolated elderly people by offering monthly tea parties where they can reconnect or make new friends in their own community. If you know of an elderly person who could benefit, please get in touch on 07539 276054. Guests need to be aged over 75 and living alone, and must be mobile enough to walk to a driver's car with assistance. Find info at www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk or on Facebook @ ContacttheElderlyRedditch

AGE UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire have a free Dementia Café at Finstall Village hall. It is a free social hub aimed at people with dementia, their families, and carers in Bromsgrove and the surrounding areas. It takes place every 2nd Wednesday of the month from 10.30am-12.30pm.

BROMSGROVE Photographic Society is a friendly, active and mutually supportive club for those keen to learn about, or improve, their photographic and digital imaging skills. The growing membership has skills ranging from novice to highly skilled, within wide-ranging subjects. The club meets on Tues nights, 8-10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. For more info, visit www.bromsgroveps.com or see Facebook and Twitter.

ROTARY Club of Bromsgrove meets every 2nd Tues of the month at Maekong Thai Restaurant, and every 4th Tues at Bromsgrove School, both 7pm for 7.30pm. New members welcome. For more info visit www.bromsgroverotary.org.uk or contact Ron Pearce on 07703 567982.

HEART Of England Speakers is a friendly public speaking club, based in Solihull. It is affiliated to Toastmasters International, and meets on the 1st and 3rd Tues of each month, 7.30—9.30pm, at the Silhillians Sports Club and Events Centre. If you would like to boost your confidence get in touch via www.heartspeakers.org.uk, Instagram @ toastmastersheartofengland, or via LinkedIn.

REDDITCH Rotary Club meets Monday lunchtimes at the Abbey Hotel, Hither Green Lane, Redditch, B98 9BE. You would be very welcome to join in. Want to be involved, hear interesting speakers, and serve your community? Want to know more? Contact Peter Williams on 01527 60277.

LICKEY PHAB Club is a social club where people aged 14 and over, with and without disabilities, can come together each week to have fun! It is affiliated to national charity Phab. The club meets every Mon from 7.30–9.30pm at The Trinity Centre, Lickey Parish Hall to have fun, play games, do crafts or just chat – there's also a tuck shop! More info from Louise Boother on 07814 122990 or lickeyphabclub@hotmail.com

BEACON Ladies Club meets at 8pm on alternate Weds evenings at The Hawthorns Social Club, Rednal Hill Lane, Rednal. There is a varied programme of speakers and outings, including occasional visits to the theatre. New members of all ages welcome. £12 annual membership, plus £2 fortnightly. Call Barbara on 0121 445 3456 or Anita on 445 3770.

BARNT GREEN FRIENDSHIP CLUB meets every 2nd Tues of the month at 2.15pm at the Burcot Grange. Visitors £3 to include tea and biscuits. Members 50p. Ladies and gents both welcome. For more details call Rosalind on 0121 445 0598.

THE WORCESTER-BIRMINGHAM & DROITWICH CANALS SOCIETY holds regular monthly meetings in the meeting room behind The Weighbridge Pub, Scarfield Hill, Alvechurch on the first Tuesday of the month at 7.45pm. There is usually a guest speaker. They promote the upkeep of the canals to ensure that the heritage is looked after for all to enjoy and are a registered charity. Find out more: www.wbdcs.org.uk or Facebook @ wbdcs.org.uk. or email contact@wbdcs.org.uk. Non-members are welcome. Free entry.

ALVECHURCH WEDNESDAY CLUB The 14th February marks their first meeting of 2024. They will be holding a very short (and sweet) AGM and that will be followed by a Beetle Drive, with prizes naturally! They hope you will join for fun and refreshments amongst the happy group of members. They meet at the Cricket Club, usually on the 2nd Wednesday of the month, at 1.30pm. More info from Janet on 447 7870 or Lis on 445 3895.

COFFEE, Cake and Chat is a place to meet new friends or catch up with old friends (includes a dedicated baby area) on the 4th Friday of each month 10:30am - 12pm at The Wheel, Blackwell. No charge, donations welcome. More info on 0121 445 1425.

LICKEY Hills Local History Society meets monthly at 7.30pm in the Trinity Centre, Old Birmingham Road, Lickey B45 8ES. Annual subscription £15. Non-members £3 per meeting. For more information please email: info@lhlhs.org.uk or visit: www.lhlhs.org.uk

BROMSGROVE (1982) PROBUS Club provides opportunities for retired and semi retired men to meet socially. A members meeting is held at Avoncroft Arts Centre on the 3rd Wednesday monthly 10am until 12pm, including refreshments and a talk by a guest speaker.
Other regular activities include monthly walks, lunches including partners, snooker--, social outings and IT. For more info visit www.bromsgrove1982probus.weebly.com or contact Martin on 07717 150136.

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Soroptimists meets every 2nd Thurs of the month at Burcot Village Hall. New members welcome – pop to a meeting, email sibrsoroptimist@gmail.com or ring 07812 985927.

ALVECHURCH Historical Society has a planned programme of talks on the first Monday of the month at 7.45pm at The Ark, St Laurence Church, Alvechurch. More details from Anne Humphries on 0121 445 5955. New members welcome.

KINGFISHER PROBUS Club of Redditch is recruiting retired and semi-retired men to join them in a friendly environment. They meet every 2nd Thurs of the month at 11.30am at the Court Leet,174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove B61 7AY, with a short meeting at noon then lunch followed by an interesting talk given by a visiting speaker. Partners/friends welcome to join for walks, trips, golf, skittles and special lunches. Contact Chris Bailey on 01527 835802 for confirmation of date and venue. More info at www.kingfisherprobusredditch.co.uk

BROMSGROVE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at Bromsgrove Rugby Club. Doors open 7.30pm, speakers begin 7.45pm. Admission free on your first visit; refreshments available. Observing meetings are also held on the first Monday each month – bring your telescopes. More info via www.broms-astro.org.uk, www.facebook.com/bromsastro or emailing info@broms-astro.org.uk

ROTARY CLUB of Lickey Hills meets on Monday evenings, 7.15 for 7.30pm, at Hillscourt Conference Centre (NASUWT headquarters) on Rose Hill (B45 8RS). For details contact Graham Wiseman on 0121 460 1402.

SILVER THREADS, the Alvechurch club, meets on the first Weds each month at 2pm in Alvechurch Village Hall. You'll be sure of a welcome in this friendly atmosphere, where members can chat over a cup of tea. There are regular bingo sessions, and occasional days out. New members welcome. More info from Pat on 0121 447 8630.

WOODRUSH RUGBY Club "Old Dogs" meet at 8pm on the 2nd Thurs in the month at the Clubhouse, Icknield Street, 01564 822878. Open to all former players, social members and old friends for a social chat and the odd reminisce over a glass of beer. Join us: call Mike Betts on 07960 303254 or visit www.woodrushrfc.co.uk or info@woodrushrfc.co.uk

BIODIVERSITY WALKS

MARY GREEN'S next biodiversity walks will be on Tuesday 6 February and Wednesday 14 February at 10.30am. These are slow, easy walks to look at areas of good habitat for wildlife around Alvechurch. Meet at Alvechurch station steps. The walk takes about 2 hours.

The North Worcestershire Association of the NATIONAL TRUST hold monthly meetings with interesting speakers on 3rd Thursday 7.30pm at Tardebigge Community Hall, also walks, outings and an annual holiday. For further info email Ros257@yahoo.co.uk

Bromsgrove & District AMATEUR RADIO CLUB meets every Friday evening from 7.30pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. The club is open to anyone with an interest in Amateur Radio. More details from the secretary Alan on 07886 000052 or secretary@bromsgroveradioclub.co.uk

COMMUNITY COFFEE morning - open to all. Free refreshments and chat. Wednesdays 10-12 at Barnt Green Baptist Church. Enquiries can be made to: events@bgb.org.uk

THE MACULAR Society Barnt Green Support Group meets on the last Fri of the month (with some exceptions) at The Parish Centre, behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, B45 8NR, 2–4pm. Friendly, self-help group, proving there is more to life than this devastating eye condition. New members always welcome. For more info, ring Wendy on 0121 445 1585 or Alan on 01527 877864.

SPORT, FITNESS & HEALTH

UPTON WARREN SAILING CLUB sails throughout the year at Aztec (Upton Warren) opposite Webb's Garden Centre, Wychbold. A small, friendly club with both mixed fleet racing and cruising sessions. Most members sail their own boats but there are also club boats available for members to use. See www.uwsc.co.uk to find out more or contact membership@uwsc.co.uk

JOOLISM HIIT CLASSES. Semi-PT resistance training for ladies only in a well-equipped gym in Bromsgrove. For ladies who want toned and strong bodies. Attendance must be pre-booked via julie@joolismfitness.co.uk

WOODRUSH RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB, Icknield Street, Alvechurch, B38 0EL is recruiting: Senior (Men & Ladies) U17 Colts Mini/Junior & Micros. Call 07341 256821 for recruitment or 01564 822878 (Clubhouse) email info@woodushrfc.co.uk or see: www.drushrfc.co.uk Facebook @WoodrushRFC

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY'S WALKS are held at 2pm of the first Sunday of the month unless noted otherwise. For walks starting outside the village, please contact the walk leader if you need a lift. Occasionally, weather conditions mean that a walk must be cancelled at late notice: check with the leaders or the AVS website if unsure. Always wear appropriate footwear. Contact walks organiser Tony Brannon for more information about the walks: avswalks@gmail.com. There are a number of walks coming up, the next will be on Sunday 4 February, Hilary Taylor will lead a walk from The Crown to Hopwood and back. Meet at The Crown, B48 7PN. Contact 0121 445 0107 for more information.
The following walk Around Rowney Green will be on Sunday March 3 at 2pm led by Martin and Mariea Clarke. Meet at Rowney Green Village Hall B48 7QP. Call 07742 100007 for details.

BARNT GREEN FISHING CLUB controls the fishing (both game and coarse) on the Bittell Reservoirs. Interested parties - contact: bgfcmembership@outlook.com or Facebook @ Barnt Green Fishing Club.

REDDITCH & Bromsgrove Company of Archers meet April–Sept, Mon 6.30pm and Fri 6.30pm at Meadow Park Football Ground (by Harris Brush Works – outdoors) and Oct–March on Fri 6.30pm at Studley Leisure Centre (indoors). Really friendly no-pressure club. New members always welcome (juniors from 8 years old, seniors from 18 to 80+, seasoned archers or absolute beginners). Beginners' courses run throughout the year or taster sessions by appointment. Further info from rbcoaCoach@gmail.com, rbcoasecretary@gmail.com, or www.redditcharchers.org

REDDITCH Ramblers is a growing, friendly and sociable group offering a full walks programme including walks every Sat and Sun and a midweek walk most weeks. Sun walk is usually 6–9 miles; the Sat walk is more challenging, usually 10–12 miles. Midweek walks vary, sometimes morning walks followed by option of lunch or full day walking. The Saturday Strollers walk fortnightly (4–5 miles). Newcomers are always welcome and can walk three times with the group before deciding if they want to join. The group also arranges holidays, coach trips and social events throughout the year. Full info at redditch.ramblers@gmail.com or www.redditchramblers.org.uk

PHYSIOTHERAPY-LED Pilates Classes in Cofton Hackett, Barnt Green and Lickey Hills. Mixed ability Daytime and Evening classes available. Mother & Baby classes also run by Women's Health Physiotherapists. Small and welcoming classes aimed to improve balance, muscle tone and posture as well as overall body strength. Contact Elizabeth on 07850 604425

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or elizabethalexanderltd@gmail.com or see www.elizabethalexanderphysiotherapy.com

CLUBBERCISE@ Alvechurch: Get sweat and glow! Get ready for exercise in disguise. You'll be dancing yourself happy and sweating until you sparkle, without even realising it. Mondays 7.30–8.30pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

POUND FITNESS@ Alvechurch: Channel your inner rockstar with this full body cardio-jam session. Using Ripstix®, lightly-weighted drumsticks engineered specifically for exercising, POUND transforms drumming into an incredibly effective way of working out. Weds 7.30–8.15pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

MEDITATION CLASSES for Everyone. Come and try a KIND approach to Meditation and experience for yourself the revitalising power of a relaxed, calm, clear mind, whether beginner or experienced practitioner. Classes with community and an experienced teacher, at The Ark, Alvechurch, online or a mixture. REDUCE STRESS, FEEL CALMER, SLEEP BETTER. To join us for a trail contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085, F Sally My Yoga Mind

BARNT GREEN Sailing Club offers regular sailing, either racing or casual sailing, in beautiful surroundings at Upper Bittell reservoir. For info contact secretary@bgsc.uk or see www.sailingbarntgreen.com

BRIAR Rose Field Archers is a field archery club based near Bromsgrove. There are two qualified coaches for those interested in taking up the sport. For information contact briarrosefieldarchers@gmail.com

YOGA Really Works: classes on Thurs evenings (term-time only), 7–8pm at Cotteridge Quaker Meeting House, Watford Road. Six-week blocks £45. Slow and mindful rhythmic movement in time with the breath. Accessible venue— classes open to wheelchair uses and less abled persons. Contact George on 07490 781637 or yogareallyworks@outlook.com, see www.yogareallyworks.co.uk or on Facebook @Yogareallyworks

THE RAMBLERS Bromsgrove Group: Guided walking with our group for pleasure, fitness and fun. Full programme of walks / events throughout the year. More info at www.bromsgroveramblers.webs.com or call Martin on 01527 857117 or Peter on 01527 558203.

ALVECHURCH WALKING Buddies: join a regular local walk with like-minded people who simply want to go on a local, sedate and friendly walk with no pressure. Well-behaved owners and their dogs are very welcome. The group meets at 10.30am every Thurs. For more info, search for 'alvwb' on Facebook or contact Tony on 07763 468893.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL run a series of weekly health walks around Bromsgrove and its districts. The walks are usually steady in pace and led by qualified walk leaders, and free to attend. Where it exists, walks are often followed by guided sessions on the park gym equipment.
Blackwell Gentle Walk, Wednesdays, 10.30am, start opposite the entrance to St. Catherine's Church.
Lickey End Walking for Health, Tuesdays, 10am, meet at Lickey End Recreation Ground car park. Oakalls and Harwood Park Health Walk, Wednesdays, 2pm, meet at The Oakalls Play Area. Sanders Park Walk, Mondays, 9.50am for 10am start, meet at the café kiosk near the car park. There are three options: Short (30mins), Medium (2-3miles in 60-75mins), and Fast (3+ miles in 60mins). Bromsgrove Rural Walk, Fridays, 9.45am for 10am departure, meet in the Sanders Park car park extension. These rural walks vary between 4 and 7 miles and can involve driving, a system of car sharing has been established. Stoke Heath Health Walks, Thursdays, 10.30am, meet at Stoke Heath Recreation Ground. Wythall Health Walk, Wednesday, 2pm, meet at Wythall car park B47 6LZ.

SOCIAL TENNIS takes place at Rubery Community & Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, Rubery B45 9AD on Mondays from 1–3pm. The group would welcome a few more players – just turn up or ring Don on 01527 759 318.

SARACEN Cycling Club is seeking new members. Men, ladies, beginners, and regular riders are all welcome. The long-established club meets regularly by the Tardebigge Pub on Thurs at 10am and Sun at 9.45am. See www.saracenroadclub.com or call Ivor on 0121 453 2287.

LONGBRIDGE Cycling Club meets weekly on Tues and either Sat or Sun. Ride pace generally at 9-11mph overall average, varied distances. Hotel and hostel weekends away, cycle camping adventures, social outings and much more. All ages, beginners, and seasoned cyclists all welcome. Call or text Deb on 07738 982161, email debweston@aol.com or see www.longbridgecyclingclub.com or Facebook @longbridgecyclingclub

MERCIAN NORDIC WALKING: come and try a taster session for fun, fitness and friendship. More info at www.merciannordicwalking.co.uk Online fitness and personal training available at www.mercianfitness.co.uk

PILATES with Steff Affleck (Rowney Green) Mat classes, apparatus 1:1 and duets. Irrespective of age, gender, health or fitness we could all benefit from understanding more about how to keep moving well. Joseph Pilates' system of exercise, using apparatus he invented, enables you to challenge what is strong, build what is weaker, exploring how you can balance the body to move away from pain and discomfort towards greater resilience and independence. Graduate of Pilates Professional Advanced Teacher Training; teaching Pilates for 17 years. Call 07759590830 or see www.steffaffleck.co.uk Mat classes and 1:1 (apparatus).

BARNT Green Sports Club (Margesson Drive, Barnt Green, B45 8LR) offers racquet sports in a friendly environment, plus running and cycling groups. Clubhouse with licensed bar. More info from Nick Butcher on 0121 445 1978 or visit www.barntgreensportsclub.co.uk

CATSHILL FC offers youth coaching sessions each Saturday morning at Catshill Middle School, Meadow Road, Catshill, B61 0JW. Boys and girls from Reception age upwards are welcome. Contact Gary on 07462 118920 or see www.catshillfc.co.uk for further info.

BROMSGROVE & REDDITCH Badminton Club welcomes players for social and league play. Playing Sunday evenings 5.40 to 7.40pm. Details from Steve Whittaker 07805 051456.

PILATES with Lottie Newberry: Physiotherapy-led Pilates classes every Monday in Alvechurch in the day and Barnt Green in the evening. Contact Lottie on lottienewberrypilates@hotmail.com. All abilities welcome.

ACTIVE SENIORS Exercise Classes at Alvechurch Village Hall, run by Bromsgrove council on Fridays starting 9.15am, £5 per class. Contact g.peart@hotmail.co.uk orc on 07828 515344 for more information.

YOGA for Every-Body. Come and try a fresh approach to Yoga, that works with your body rather than against it. A slow-paced, yet powerful Yoga for EveryBody, whether beginner or experienced, flexible or wishing you were. Classes with community and an experienced teacher, at The Ark, Alvechurch, Blackwell First School, online or a mixture. MOVE BETTER, BE CALMER, FEEL GREAT! To trial a class, contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085, F: Sally My Yoga Mind

TAI CHI (Qigong) sessions in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mon 10–11am and Friday 10.30. Qigong is an integration of physical postures, breathing techniques, and focused intentions. More details Nige on 07966069956 or nige@mindfulmoves.co.uk

FIVE WAYS Old Edwardians' Cricket Club at Ash Lane, Hopwood: Junior, Men's and Women's teams, come and join in! Open to all. Excellent facilities. Everyone welcome. Coaching for juniors on Fri evenings May to Aug. Contact Mark Tovey on 01527 835031.

NEW Ravens (North East Worcestershire Ravens Rugby League Club) is now based at Forshaw Heath Lane, Portway, B94 5LH. Junior training and 'little leaguers' take place on Sun mornings from 10.30am, with open-age and touch on Weds evenings from 7pm. All welcome at this family-orientated club. Contact Gail on 07515 020844 or Jason on 07957 248464 visit www.newravens.net

KINGS Norton Rhinos offers contact and non-contact rugby for children from Reception to Year 12. A safe and friendly introduction to rugby – and plenty of outdoor fun and exercise! Training takes place at KNRFC Ash Lane, Hopwood, on Sundays from 9.30–11.30am. Contact Simon Thompson on 07968 424585 or visit www.knrfc.co.uk

HOPWOOD Ladies Cycling Club meets at Hopwood Playing Field on Tuesdays at 11.30am and Wednesdays at 9.30am. For information, visit www.hopwoodladiescyclingclub.co.uk or phone Sheila Evans on 07779 530017.

MARTIAL ARTS Kickboxing/Karate at The Ark Tuesdays 6.30-7.30. For more information please visit www.forcecombatmartialarts.co.uk

SLIMMING WORLD at Cofton Village Hall, on Wednesdays 9:30am, 5:30pm and 7:30pm.

ASSERTIVENESS AND HELPING SKILLS DONINGTON TRAINING runs classes at Alvechurch Village Hall. Easy, enjoyable and effective learning. Wednesdays from 19th January, pay what you think and can afford, any profits go to The Village Hall. For info: http://tinyurl.com/DTcdates or John Talbut (0121) 445 4607.

6 WEEK MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS COURSES to help you relax, find inner peace, and elevate your life. Join them on Wednesday evenings at The Friends Meeting House in Barnt Green or online whenever it suits you. Suitable for everyone! Enrol in the upcoming courses and discover how they've been changing lives at www.MeditationWithCoz.com or contact Coz at 07770067349. Follow on Facebook/Instagram: @MeditationWithCoz.

BARNT GREEN CHUGGERS & CHAINGANG provide run & cycling sessions for mixed abilities, those wanting to stay in shape plus those wishing to improve their running, cycling & fitness all in a social & recreational environment. Club Sessions - Chuggers (run) Monday & Wednesday 7pm and Chaingang (cycling) Wednesday 7pm & Saturday 9am all

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CHARITY DONATIONS IN LIEU OF CHRISTMAS CARDS

Members of Bromsgrove Probus Club have made a donation to the Primrose Hospice. Glyn Cornish, club chairman, presented a cheque for £76 to Gabrielle Haines (pictured above). The money was raised by members in November who contributed to a collection in lieu of sending Christmas cards to each other.
The club members meet at the Avoncroft Arts Centre Hall the second Wednesday morning of the month (10am) and have social get together along with interesting speakers. All would be welcome to join them.
Contact chairman Glyn Cornish on 01527 873711
or secretary David Valentine on 07795035655

THE MIDLAND SINFONIA
Professional Orchestra reaching out to the Heart of England

The Ark, St Laurence Church, Alvechurch B48 7SB
Saturday 24 February 2024
doors & bar open at 6.45pm for prompt 7.30pm start

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE QUIZ & SUPPER EVENING

OUR ENTERTAINING AND POPULAR ANNUAL FUNDRAISER RETURNS

£12pp to inc. SUPPER
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to book:
www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk
midlandsinfonia@gmail.com
or Marian 07889 147 861

THE ELMLEY FOUNDATION

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from Barnt Green Sports Club. For more info or to arrange a trial session please contact Membership Secretary kategallimore@googlemail.com

GENTLE EXERCISE CLASSES working on mobility, strength, flexibility and balance. Classes are very welcoming and inclusive and are held on: Wednesday's 1.30-2.30 at St Stephens Church Hall, Rednal and Thursdays 10am-11am Blackwell Community Hall, Blackwell. The cost is £5 per class. For more information call Lorraine 07866877881

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

BABY Bounce & Rhyme is at Alvechurch Library Mondays 10–10.30am. Sing-a-long to traditional nursery rhymes and action songs.

STORYTIME at Alvechurch Library is on Tuesdays 11–11.30. Silly stories and tall tales for pre-school children to enjoy with parents and carers.

EVERY SCOUT GROUP in Bromsgrove (which includes Barnt Green, Blackwell, Catshill, Finstall and Lickey as well as the town centre) currently has girls and boys aged 6-18 waiting to join, their numbers restricted by the ratio of adults to young people.
A few more adults helping would enable existing leaders to open more Beaver, Cub, Scout and Explorer units allowing more young people to experience Scouting and learn skills for life. If you could spare a few hours each month please contact us on 07539 031740 or visit scoutshw.org.uk

CURIOUS CUBS: An outdoor playgroup promoting nature and learning through play. Sessions run on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays for walkers to five years. Based at Barnt Green Sports Club, Margesson Drive, B45 8LR. Visit www.curiouscubs.co.uk for more infomation and to book your place.

DRAMA TOTS: Award-winning imaginary play classes for children 18 months to 5 years. Classes run term-time on Monday mornings in Alvechurch/Thursdays in Finstall (other days/ venues available). Contact Jo 07738 969460 for details.

TINY CHURCH (stay and play for under-5s and their carer) meets in Holy Trinity Church, Lickey, each Weds from 11.15am–12.30pm during term times. Games, toys, snacks and stories, and a time to meet together with God. Just pop along, ring 0121 445 1425 or email clive.rushton@btinternet.com

THE NATIONAL CHILDBIRTH TRUST (NCT) runs ever-popular antenatal and postnatal courses to grow your knowledge and your network, allowing you to feel prepared and confident moving into the next chapter of your life. Discover and learn with other local parents-to-be, make vital connections and life-long friends in your community. Courses are held at St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green. Visit www.nct.org.uk/courses-workshops or call 0300 330 0700.

SOLIHULL BABY MASSAGE is at Rowney Green Village Hall on Tuesday's. A relaxed environment for parents and babies to bond through massage. Visit www.solihullbabymassage.co.uk

RHYTHM TIME is a fun, award-winning developmental music classes for the under 5's. Classes in Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Bromsgrove, Redditch and lots more. Contact Vicky 07712 675 697 or visit www.rhythmtime.net

NEW ROAD PARENTS SUPPORT for parents of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans children meets monthly in Bromsgrove. A confidential, voluntary, small support group for parents by parents. Close links with FFLAG.
Visit www.newroadparents.org, email newroadparents@gmail.com or get in touch via Facebook @New Road Parents Lgbtqi+ Support Group.

THEATRETRAIN Bromsgrove, performing arts for children 4-18yrs. Saturdays 10.30am-1.30pm. For a half-price trial email bromsgrove@theatretrain.co.uk or call 07766 724834.

TUTORING both online and in-person for Maths KS1 and KS2. English KS1 through to GCSE. For more information message 'Tutoring with Penny' on Facebook or email penny_foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

PRE-SCHOOL BALLET - NEW for September 2023 Pre-school (2 ½ - 4 yrs) ballet held at Barnt Green Baptist Church on Monday mornings from 10 am. Contact dancingpointe@outlook.com for further details.

GAMES & COMPETITIONS

SHIRLEY & WYTHALL CHESS CLUB meets at Wythall Community Association in Silver Street, Wythall, B47 6LZ, every Thurs from 7.30pm. The club has four teams playing in competitive leagues. Friendly atmosphere. New players are most welcome, just turn up or contact Barry Knee on 01564 826250

MONDAY Bridge Club at Barnt Green Friends Meeting House meets on Monday evenings at 6.30pm. They would love to welcome new members. If you have played a little bridge in the past, come along to try the friendly club. For more information call Olivia on 07583 484065.

FRIDAY Bridge Club meets at Burcot Village Hall every Friday evening. We play friendly, competitive Bridge in comfortable surrounds. We meet at 18:45 for a prompt start at 19:00. Refreshments are provided free of charge. For full details please contact the Secretary Ed Payne on 07950951122 or visit www.bridgewebs.com/friday

BROMSGROVE Bridge Club plays every Tuesday evening from 7.25 to 10.30pm at The Court Leet (a Hungry Horse Pub) 174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove, B61 7AY.
We are very friendly and welcome guests or potential new members, with or without a partner. The club is affiliated to the English Bridge Union and the Worcestershire Contract Bridge Association. Contact the Secretary, Sally Flood, on 01527 832468 or sallyflood@gmail.com

BROMSGROVE Board Gamers is a friendly group which meets at 7.30pm each Weds at the Ladybird Inn, Aston Fields. More info on Facebook 'Bromsgrove Board Gamers'.

BARNT Green Duplicate Bridge Club meets at St Andrew's Church Hall each Weds afternoon at 1.39pm. The club would make new members very welcome. For more information, speak to Cathy on 0121 445 1518.

REDDITCH CHESS CLUB meets at Alvechurch & Hopwood Cricket Club, Birmingham Road, Alvechurch B48 7TA, every Wednesday at 7.15pm September - May.
The club has teams playing in both Birmingham and Worcester leagues. New players are welcome - just turn up or contact Giles Stanton on 07932 053621 or David Smith on 07540 304620.

ART, CRAFT & LITERATURE

THE WITHYBED POETS are local people who write poetry and share and discuss it with each other. You don't have to live in Withybed Green, though most of their meetings are there. They meet regularly every six weeks or so. They like to read to local audiences and some of them write "poetry on request." For more information, contact mail@marygreen.plus.com.

PAINTING & DRAWING If you enjoy painting and drawing, try this friendly community group which meets in the Rubery Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, on Monday mornings, 9am-1pm, catering for all ages and abilities. The facilities are excellent for both indoor and outdoor working depending on personal preference and weather conditions. Tea and coffee is provided. Places are available. For further information telephone: 0121 453 7716 (Fridays).

COMMON THREAD: Bring your knitting, crochet, patchwork, sewing etc. All are welcome. Friendly help and chat. Meets on the last Saturday of each month (apart from Christmas Day, of course!) in The Wheel at St. Catherine's, Blackwell B60 1BN. Please bring your own drink to stay covid safe. Further information from Angela Bevan 0121 477 9924.

THE "CRAFTY LADIES" craft group meets every Monday morning in Alvechurch Library from 10am–1pm, with knitting, crocheting, sewing, quilting etc. More info on 01905 822722.

BURCOT WOODTURNING CLUB offers a friendly meeting place for woodturners of all abilities and experience. A varied programme includes demos, talks, hands-on practical evenings and visits to exhibitions. The group meets on the first Thurs each month, 7.15–9.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Visit www.burcotwoodturners.org.uk

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY is available to host day and short courses such as card-making or scrapbooking. If you have a skill to teach or share and would like to rent a space, call the Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

AVONCROFT ARTS SOCIETY at Avoncroft Arts Centre (Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR), runs tutored/ non-tutored classes in Art, Textiles, Ceramics, Embroidery and Dance. Contact AAS on 01527 833829 or avoncroft-arts@btconnect.com

ALVECHURCH ART GROUP meets at the Baptist Hall (rear of church) every Tues from 1–3.30pm, using all mediums except oil. All welcome, especially beginners. Friendly tuition. Call Paul on 0121 445 5437 or drop in.

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY Readers Group meets in the library on the first Thursday of the month from 2pm–3pm. New members always welcome. And don't forget that you can access online audio and e-books 24/7, free of charge, by downloading the Borrowbox app. Visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/libraries

LICKEY HILLS ART SOCIETY, a friendly bunch of artists and those interested in art, meet at Longbridge Methodist Church, Bristol Road, B45 9TY, on the first Sat each month at 7.30pm. Open to artists and non-artists alike. For more info email Lyn lyndasharp2010@yahoo.com or come along – the members would love to see you.

SEW TOGETHER meets on Tuesday mornings from 9.30am to 12.30pm during term time at the new Cofton Village hall. They meet weekly to sew and socialise. All abilities are welcome and there are a variety of sewing machines to borrow if required. For more information contact Avril on sewtogether64@gmail.com or see Sew Together Cofton Hackett on Facebook.

BARNT GREEN ART CLUB meets at Barnt Green Scout and Guide Headquarters in Blackwell Road just beyond the Barnt Green Social Club. They run Tuesday morning and afternoon sessions with visiting tutors at 2 - 3 week intervals. Interested artists of all abilities are welcome. Please phone Jackie on 0121 445 4745 for details.

MARLBROOK QUILTERS meet on the 1st Wednesday of the month at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. They are a small friendly group who would like to welcome new members. For more information contact Maggie Forknell 07973 313034 or Sheila Nunnerley 0121 445 2238.

THE SEASONS ART CLASS is an art course where you can discover your inner artist. Perfect for absolute beginners to improvers. Classes held at Rowney Green Village Hall, Bournheath Village Hall & Ullenhall Village Hall. Get in touch to find out more by emailing seasonsartredditch@outlook.com.

KINGS NORTON PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY meet at The Tennis Club, Grange Hill Road, Birmingham B38 8RE. Season starts 18/10/23 at 8.00pm. For information contact Dave Wall Tel: 0121 458 2562, email: dave.walluk@virgin.net

FORGE MILL CREATIVE TEXTILE GROUP are a friendly group of enthusiastic local stitchers, both experienced and beginners. They meet on Friday mornings at Beoley Village Hall. They are a leisure learning and development group exploring various techniques and media to create textiles artwork. Please contact Lynda on 0121 445 3212 or Janet on 0121 445 4335 for more information.

GARDENS & FLOWERS

BLACKWELL COMMUNITY GARDEN in the grounds of St Catherine, Blackwell. Pop along to help water, plant and harvest. Info on 0121 445 1425.

ROWNEY GREEN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY meets at The Village Hall on the second Thursday of each month at 7.15pm. On February 8th 2024 they welcome Speaker Neil Cook, Head Gardener at Hanbury Hall and his topic is "The Restoration of Hanbury Hall Gardens". Guests are always welcome £3.50 including coffee and biscuits. For more information please do not hesitate to contact Lindsay Smith on 01527 592874.

DODFORD GARDENING CLUB meets on the 2nd Monday each month (except August) usually in Dodford Village Hall at 7.45pm. New members and visitors welcome. More info at www.dodfordgardeningclub.co.uk or call Penny on 07706 153618.

ROWNEY GREEN FLOWER CLUB, meets on the fourth Thursday of the month except in December when it is the first Thursday. The cost for visitors is £5, with refreshments included. Arrangements will be raffled at the event.

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BROMSGROVE FLOWER CLUB holds regular monthly meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Meets at 2pm, at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove B601AF. A yearly membership is available or come as a visitor & dip in & out. Refreshments & then a demonstration of flower arrangements and a raffle and you may be lucky and take one home. Further information on 0121 445 1915.

SOLIHULL & District Orchid Society meets on the 1st Sat each month at St George & St Teresa's Parish Centre, Station Road, Dorridge B39 8EZ. New members and visitors welcome. For more information or advice you can call Monica Johnson on 01926 747822 or email at kenneth.johnson99@ntlworld.com. You can also visit www.solihullorchidsociety.co.uk to see more.

HELP & ADVICE

POPPIES' is a monthly bereavement support group — contact Rev Sheri Gidney on 0121 445 1185 for details.

DIVORCED/separated and having trouble seeing your children? Being excluded from their lives? The ASSOCIATION FOR SHARED PARENTING has been helping mums and dads in the family court system and problems over contact and residence for over 20 years. Visit www.associationforsharedparenting.org.uk

REPAIR CAFE is for those looking to save their money and fix broken or faulty household items. The Repair Cafe is part of an international network that keeps faulty appliances and clothes out of landfill and offers 'a cuppa' and a slice of cake to visitors while they wait. Visit the Repair Shop on the first Saturday of every month 2-5pm at All Saints Hall, Burcot Lane, B60 1AD. For more info: 07804251731 or repaircafebromsgrove@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY hosts one-to-one Computer Sessions for people wanting to learn the basics. If you need help with emails or advice on surfing online then pop in to arrange for free tuition, provided by volunteers. They can also help with online applications for Blue Badges and bus passes. For more info call The Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

GUIDE DOGS are looking for volunteers who could give a few hours of their time to help someone locally and living with sight loss, get out and about. Volunteer sighted guides support the person they are partnered with to feel part of the community. No previous experience is necessary, full training will be provided and the role is extremely flexible! More information email MidlandsMSG@guidedogs.org.uk or visit www.guidedogs.org.uk

WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

FINSTALL CROSS WI meets at Finstall Village Hall on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm. For more info see www.finstallcross-wi.wordpress.com or email finstallcrosswi@gmail.com

BEOLEY WI meets on the first Tuesday of each month in Beoley Village Hall at 7pm. More info from Joan Lovett on 01527 584047 or email beoleysec@wfedwi.org.uk

BENTLEY PAUNCEFOOT WI meets at 7pm on the second Tuesday every month between April and November, and at 12pm December to March, at Bentley Village Hall (B97 5TB). More information from Helen Spence (01527 822622)or email bentleypauncefootsec@wfedwi.org.uk

BARNT GREEN WI meets at the Baptist Church at 7.30pm on the 3rd Thursday of the month. For more information: Jenny Jellie 07983 865372.

BROMSGROVE BELLES WI meets on the second Monday each month at the Meeting Room at St Godwald's Church at 7.30pm. For more info, contact President Helen Holbeche at helenholbeche@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH WI meets on the second Monday each month in Alvechurch Village Hall, at 7.30pm. For more information email Lin Neal lin.neal@hotmail.com or alvechurch-pres@wfedwi.org.uk

LICKEY WI usually meets on the first Tues every month at 7.30pm in the Parish Hall (Trinity Centre), Old Birmingham Road, Lickey. More info from Jenny Ryder on 0121 445 1872, Lickeywi@gmail.com or www.lickeywi.wordpress.com

HILLSIDE AT ALVECHURCH WI meets at 7.45pm on the first Weds each month at The Ark, Alvechurch. For more info call Pat McDonagh on 0121 628 4121.

BLACKWELL & BURCOT WI meets at Burcot Village Hall on the second Weds each month, at 2pm. For info call President Mrs Barbara Knight on 0121 445 3456.

HOPWOOD WI meets at Hopwood Village Hall on the first Thurs of the month at 7.30pm. For more information call Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668.

ST CATHERINE'S BLACKWELL WI meets on the 3rd Wednesday each month at 7.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Contact Sue Barrett for more information on 01527 596092 or susanbarratt222@gmail.com

RUBERY WI meets on the 2nd Weds of the month at 7.30pm at Beacon Church Centre, when there are speakers, activities and competitions. The 4th Weds of each month is the craft evening. Non-members are welcome. Contact Judie1055@yahoo.co.uk 07810765314.

FAIRFIELD WI meet at Fairfield village hall on the second Wednesday of the month at 7pm. For further details contact Carol Hine at fairfieldwi1932@gmail.com

VILLAGE VENUES FOR HIRE

HOPWOOD VILLAGE HALL is available for hire for parties, groups and gatherings. Please contact Booking Secretary Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668 or visit www.hopwoodvillagehall.co.uk

TARDEBIGGE COMMUNITY HALL for hire: large, bright facility for functions, clubs, societies and all activities. To book call 07763 446902 or email tchbookings@gmail.com

THE WHEEL COMMUNITY ROOM IN BLACKWELL has daytime, evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire —more info on 0121 445 1425.

THE TRINITY CENTRE IN LICKEY has evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire – more info on 0121 445 1425.

BARNT GREEN PARISH CENTRE has large and medium sized lounges available for regular hire for some morning and early afternoon sessions each week. Please contact the Parish Administrator on 0121 447 7097.

THE ARK AT ST LAURENCE has a large hall and kitchen, and smaller upper room for hire, for one-off and regular hires. More information and bookings please contact Lynda on 0121 447 7955 or email admin@thearkalvechurch.co.uk

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE HALL is available for hire to groups, clubs, societies, and private parties. The hall has a stage, PA system, kitchen and bar area. There is also a smaller conference room available for hire. Enquiries to the Hall Manager Andrea Ottley on 07455892909 or hallmanager.avh@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH CRICKET CLUB PAVILION is available for hire: weekdays for community groups/clubs/societies, evening functions/private parties. Licensed bar, dance floor, kitchen area and great outdoor space. Enquiries to Stuart Brereton via 07775 714165 or ahcc.bar@gmail.com

FAIRFIELD VILLAGE HALL is available to hire for functions, groups and parties. It has a large hall with kitchen facilities. Contact the booking secretary Andrew on 07762749943 or bookings@fvh.org.uk. See website for details www.fvh.org.uk

ROWNEY GREEN VILLAGE HALL has a large hall, with stage and sprung floor (ideal for dance and exercise) and two smaller rooms. Available for one off or regular hire, ample parking. Email: admin@rowneygreenvillage-hall.org

FEATURE IN WHAT'S ON

if you have something you would like to include, the deadline for submissions to feature in the What's On section in the March 2024 issue of *The Village* is 5 February 2024. email: info@villageonline.co.uk

Above: Dan Sweeney slots home the winner against Sudbury then reels away in celebration. Pictures/***Ian Macvie***.

Dan lifts The Church

Alvechurch FC have started to turn the corner on their poor season, bringing home four points on the road as 2024 got under way.

And one player, striker Dan Sweeney, is receiving the plaudits for the uplift in results after scoring a stoppage-time equaliser at Barwell and then slotting home the winner in a 0-1 away victory at Sudbury.

In between those league matches Dan, who had arrived on an initial loan from Northern premier league side Spalding United, scored a quick-fire hat-trick against Malvern Town in the Worcestershire Senior Cup quarter-final.

Arriving beneath the majestic hills without a win in 12 matches, Alvechurch would hardly have been brimming over with confidence and the first half was quickly forgettable.

The second half continued in the same vein until the hosts scored on 66 minutes, which stung Alvechurch into action.

On 73 minutes, Sweeney levelled by driving a rebounding ball into the roof of the net, then three minutes after the 'keeper parried his shot pounced on the loose ball to put The Church in the lead.

Two minutes later, Sweeney blasted another shot past the Malvern 'keeper to seal the outcome of the tie – and give Alvechurch the confidence boost they had been searching for.

AFC FIXTURES

February

Sat 3rd	Berkhamsted (h) 3.00
Tue 6th	Halesowen Town (h) 7.45
Sat 10th	Long Eaton United (a) 3.00
Tue 13th	Stourport Swifts/Redditch United (a) Worcestershire Senior Cup semi-final
Sat 17th	Stamford (h) 3.00
Sat 24th	Leiston (a) 3.00

March

Sat 2nd	AFC Telford United (h) 3.00
Sat 9th	St Ives Town (h) 3.00
Sat 16th	Stourbridge (h) 3.00
Sat 23rd	Kettering Town (a) 3.00
Sat 30th	Mickleover (h) 3.00

The semi-final is set for February 13th away at either Stourport Swifts or Redditch United

Meanwhile, Church fans will be hoping Dan, who has previously played for local rivals Redditch United, Bromsgrove Sporting and Solihull Moors, will stay on at Lye Meadow and keep on scoring.

The club has already been boosted by the decision of club captain Josh Dugmore has rejected a lucrative offer from another club and has decided to remain at Lye Meadow.

Josh is a massive influence both on and off the pitch and always leads by example, and is a great asset as the club fights to remain in the Southern League premier division. There have also been new arrivals as the management rebuilds the squad to stay out of the bottom four.

Among these are central midfield player Kartell Dawkins and Aston Villa under-18 midfielder Dylan Mitchell, who has joined on a youth loan, along with Wolverhampton Wanderers under-21 winger Ethan McLeod, who has already added another dimension to the forward line since joining on a season-long loan.

The new year also saw the return of favourites Nick Clayton Phillips and Claudio Dias after lengthy absences through injury.

The club has sent congratulations to Kai Adan George, who has joined National league team FC Halifax Town. Kai spent three months with Alvechurch last season, scoring five goals in his 14 games for the club.

■ Remember, you can now keep up with all of the men's first team games on YouTube channel @Alvechurch Matchdays

£5,000 for hampers

THE ALVECHURCH Community Foundation, involving all of the club's teams, raised more than £5,000 from fundraising events during December, enabling 54 Christmas hampers to be distributed throughout the local community.

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